



KEY MESSAGES FOR

# RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS ON COVID-19

## Background



### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus which leads to respiratory infections in humans. COVID-19 was first detected in December 2019 and the first case in Nigeria was reported in February 2020.



### How people get Infected with COVID-19?

People can get infected with COVID-19 in several different ways. The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe; or by touching contaminated surfaces (from an infected person's droplet) and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes. The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it.



### Who is at Risk?

Everyone is at equal risk of getting COVID-19, however, older people and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer) are at greater risk for serious illness and death.



### Symptoms of COVID-19

When infected, most people, especially those who completed their vaccination, experience mild illness and recover.

The most common symptoms include:

- Fever.
- Dry cough.
- Tiredness.

Other symptoms are a combination of **sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, diarrhoea, nausea, or loss of smell and taste**. Note that different variants of the virus may cause one or more symptoms to be more prominent. These symptoms are similar to other diseases, this is why testing is required to confirm if someone has COVID-19.



### Severe symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Persistent pain
- Pressure in the chest
- Difficulty in breathing

## Why involve Religious and Traditional Leaders in COVID-19?

Religious and traditional leaders play a key role in shaping community life as community members look up to them for cultural and spiritual guidance. As such, they can enlighten the people by disseminating correct information, dispelling rumours and fake news, and ultimately by promoting and encouraging their followers to practice positive behaviours that reduce the spread and impact of the COVID-19 disease. All traditional and religious leaders are encouraged to use every opportunity to engage with the people with correct information and monitor adherence to public health guidelines for the containment of COVID-19 transmission in Nigeria.

There is the need for religious and traditional leaders to encourage their followers to get vaccinated.

Religious leaders should be mindful of misinformation and disinformation around COVID-19 prevention, testing, and vaccination messages. They should encourage getting correct

information, promote accurate sources, and direct their communities to reliable information sources about COVID-19 as issued by the designated government institutions - the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA).



### Recommendations on how to provide information to followers:



Foster an environment where everyone feels safe to share their feelings.



Equip yourself with information and updates about COVID-19 from credible sources.



Incorporate discussions about COVID-19 into program activities.



Listen and share their feedback or concerns with local authorities.



Show empathy and promote love.

## Prevention

### Advice on physical distancing

- Practice physical distancing by strictly maintaining a distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet) between people at all times.
- Use culturally and religiously sanctioned greetings that avoid physical contact, such as waving, nodding, or placing the hand over the heart.
- Take adequate precaution where large numbers of people gather during festive seasons, such as entertainment venues, markets, and shops. Precautions include physical distance when possible, washing hands and surfaces regularly, wearing a face mask, and staying home if feeling sick.
- Anyone who just returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading should avoid close contact with others and if experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, call the NCDC toll free line on 6232.

### Advice on wearing a face mask

- Wear face masks that cover the nose and mouth, as an additional layer to physical distancing and respiratory hygiene to prevent those who are unwell or infectious but without COVID-19 symptoms (asymptomatic) from spreading the disease.



### Advice to high-risk groups

- Urge people who are feeling sick or have any symptoms of COVID-19 to avoid attending events and follow the national guidance on follow-up and management of symptomatic cases.
- Urge older people and anyone with pre-existing medical conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer) not to attend gatherings, as they are considered vulnerable to severe disease and death from COVID-19.

## Mitigation measures for physical gatherings

The following measures should be applied to any religious gathering, such as;

- Services
- Prayers
- Pilgrimages
- Communal meals or banquets.



## Venue

- Consider holding the event outdoors if possible; otherwise, open windows and doors of the venue for proper ventilation.
- Encourage attendees to wear a face mask if they are indoors - as well as outdoors, when in crowded settings.
- Shorten the length of the event as much as possible to limit potential exposure.
- Where possible, give preference to holding smaller services with fewer attendees more often, rather than hosting large gatherings.
- Adhere to physical distancing among attendees when possible, both when seated and standing, through creating and assigning fixed places, including when praying, performing ablutions in communal washing facilities, as well as in areas dedicated to shoe storage.
- Create more entrance for people entering, attending, and departing from worship spaces, or other venues to ensure safe distancing at all times.
- Put in place a monitoring team to facilitate contact tracing of anyone who is sick among the attendees.

## Encourage healthy hygiene

- Ensure that handwashing facilities are adequately equipped with soap and water. Provide alcohol based hand-rub (at least 70% alcohol) at the entrance to and inside mosques and churches.
- Encourage regular hand washing as it reduces the spread of many diseases.
- Ensure the availability of disposable tissues and closed bins to guarantee the safe disposal of waste.
- Encourage the use of personal prayer rugs to place over carpets.
- Provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and general messages on COVID-19 prevention.



## Frequently clean worship spaces, sites, and buildings

- Enforce routine cleaning of venues where people gather before and after each event, using detergents and disinfectants.
- In mosques and churches, keep the facilities clean, and maintain general hygiene and sanitation.
- Regularly clean often-touched objects such as doorknobs, light switches, and stair railings with detergents and disinfectant.



# Please Remember:

---



The term 'physical distancing' means the same thing as the widely used term 'social distancing', but it more accurately describes what is intended, namely that people keep physically apart.



It is important, and for the benefit of everyone that the government investigates and tests anyone suspected of having contact with those infected with the COVID-19 virus. We should support and encourage them to seek the care they need.



Discourage the spread of rumours and falsehoods about how COVID-19 spreads, how to prevent it and how to treat those that are infected. Correct information on COVID-19 should be sought from the NCDC and NPHCDA websites and their social media platforms, radio, television and health workers.



Remind the community that blood, nasal and other body samples can be given for testing even while fasting during the month of Ramadan.



Encourage individuals or families who have been exposed to the virus or suspect they may have been infected to not keep it secret. They should self-isolate and discourage visits while trying to confirm if they have been infected by getting a test for COVID-19. If the infection is confirmed, they should inform those who need to know -including those they have been in close contact with over the last 10 days.



Speak out against negative behaviours, including negative statements on any media about groups of people, or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.



Thank, inspire, respect and recognize healthcare workers and responders and all those who have performed a valuable service to everyone by ensuring that this disease does not spread further.



## Testing

- COVID-19 tests are effective, safe, and critical to stopping this pandemic.
- Encourage followers to get tested when they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they know they have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19 symptoms. Testing is available at designated health facilities and laboratories.
- Payment is no obstacle to getting tested for COVID-19. You can get tested at no cost at a government approved testing laboratory. Check the approved laboratories by clicking on <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/laboratory/> or call 6232.
- Get tested if you have been around someone who is sick or if you live or work in a group setting, like a correctional center.
- One of the best ways to protect your loved ones from COVID-19 is to get tested if you have symptoms, regardless of your vaccination status.
- You can take steps to protect yourself while you're waiting to get tested. Wear a face mask, stay 1 metre (3 feet) from others, and wash your hands always.



## Vaccination

Vaccinations are the most effective way of preventing COVID-19.

### Why get vaccinated?

- Vaccination is a reliable means of offering protection against COVID-19.
- Current vaccines have been tested, are safe and effective in managing all COVID-19 variants.
- All the COVID-19 vaccines prevent severe disease, hospitalization and death. When we get many people vaccinated to become immune to the infection, then we will be able to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- Without evidence of COVID-19 vaccination, international travels (including travel to Saudi Arabia for the annual Muslim Pilgrimage and Lesser Hajj and visit to Jerusalem for the Christians) will not be possible. Access to government and corporate facilities will be limited only to persons with proof of COVID vaccination.

### Facts about the Vaccine



- All COVID-19 vaccines are **FREE, SAFE & EFFECTIVE** in preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death.
- The COVID-19 vaccines have been through extensive, rigorous testing and safety processes like other vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccines are **SAFE** and **EFFECTIVE** and have been approved by the WHO and NAFDAC.
- COVID-19 vaccinations take place in public health facilities including designated vaccination sites, general hospitals, and other selected locations as determined by the government.
- All COVID-19 vaccines currently under deployment **CANNOT TRANSMIT THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19.**

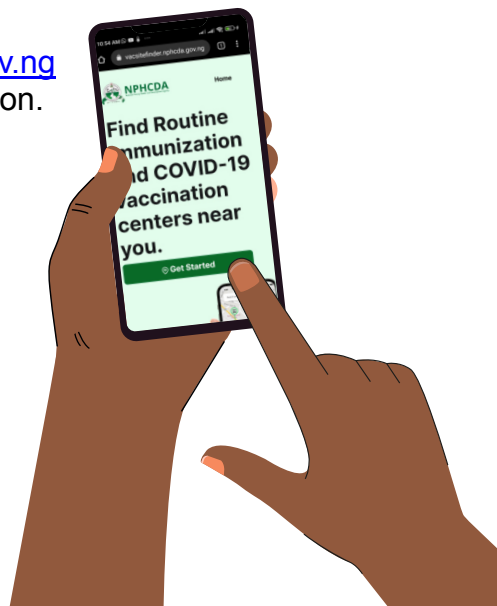
- To get maximum protection against COVID-19, each individual must be **FULLY VACCINATED** by completing the schedule recommended by the different vaccine brands.
- Like any vaccine, some people may experience mild side effects after getting vaccinated. This may include a sore arm, redness or swelling at the injection site, fatigue, headache, chills, low grade fever or nausea. These symptoms usually go away within 48 hours. If symptoms persist or get worse, the person should go to the health clinic or call the NPHCDA line on 07002201122.

### Who should get vaccinated?

- COVID-19 vaccines are **FREE** of charge to all people who are eligible for vaccination (18 years and above).
- COVID-19 is more dangerous to the elderly & people with underlying conditions. Protect these people in your family. Encourage and support them to get vaccinated.
- Students who are 16 years and above are also eligible to be vaccinated for academic purposes.

### Where can I get vaccinated?

- You can find a vaccination center near you by visiting the website <https://www.vacsitefinder.nphcda.gov.ng> and following the on-screen instruction.



## Dispelling rumours and misinformation



- The advent of social media and the internet has contributed to a large extent to the spread of rumours and misinformation, only credible sites should be trusted for information.
- Religious leaders should encourage people to patronise only credible sources of information, especially those from government and recognised bodies.
- People spreading rumours should be discouraged and advised to fear God and avoid causing confusion among people.
- When in doubt of any message or piece of information, religious leaders should enquire from governmental agencies and trusted professionals.
- There is the need to access information from professional health care workers and verifiable social media handles such as those of NCDC, WHO, UNICEF, NPHCDA, FMoH etc which address rumours and misinformation that could promote vaccine hesitancy.



## What happens after getting vaccinated?

- Even after being vaccinated, people should continue following all recommended COVID-19 prevention measures, which include maintaining a physical distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet), use of face masks covering the nose and mouth properly, and handwashing with soap and running water.

## How can I encourage people to get vaccinated?

- As a concerned citizen and role model, get vaccinated and complete the dosages. Let your followers know that you have been vaccinated.
- Motivate people to get vaccinated by promoting the safety, efficacy and ease of getting vaccinated.
- Encourage people who have been vaccinated to give testimony during meetings.
- Promote vaccine sites when mobile vans are bringing vaccines near your church or mosque.
- Spread the word - **Protect yourself from COVID-19. Get a FREE COVID-19 vaccine, it is available.**

# Take the COVID-19 Vaccination!

## Take the Shot!

Taking the COVID-19 vaccine protects you and others.

It helps to stop the disease from spreading.

**Take Responsibility!**



## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Will the COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?**

No, they cannot. They only contain instructions for our bodies to recognize and fight the COVID-19 virus.

### **Can someone still have COVID-19 after taking the vaccine?**

Yes, it is possible, however, it is mild. Vaccines stop you from getting a SEVERE form of the infection.

### **Nigeria has other pressing medical emergencies that were not tackled, why the emphasis on COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is an infectious disease, it spreads very fast and can lead to SEVERE sickness and death if not urgently tackled.

### **People are becoming more concerned as to having the two doses and another booster dose.**

On booster dose, the benefits are numerous, they include: reducing complication from the infection, reducing risk of exposure, efficacy against the variant and increasing immunity.

### **How can I advise a follower who is exhibiting signs of illness during meetings?**

Speak to them in private to keep away from others and advise them to go home. Encourage them to get a COVID-19 test done.

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Is it haram to have blood or other samples from the body taken during Ramadan?**

No, blood, nasal and other body samples can be given when fasting, it does not invalidate the fast.

### **How can I help make sure followers don't hide possible exposure to COVID?**

Create an environment where stigma is not tolerated and everyone is encouraged to get tested. If they are feeling sick, encourage them to seek medical help.

*COVID-19 is real, and it is here. The disease is no respecter of race, beliefs, religion, gender or age, it affects everyone that is exposed to it. It is the responsibility of leaders to guide their followers and subjects, safeguard their health, and enhance their wellbeing. Every individual has the responsibility to protect themselves and others through taking vaccines and practising other non-medical preventive measures such as wearing face masks which should be taken seriously by all.*

For now, the advice to people should be to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe.
- COVID-19 vaccines are effective.
- COVID-19 vaccines are available in designated vaccination sites nearest to you.
- COVID-19 vaccines are free.



# COVID-19 tests are free in public laboratories





**COVID-19 vaccines**  
are free, safe and effective



