



January 18, 2021

Dear Xaverians,

I am pleased to share the wonderful news that all three StFX students who tested positive for COVID-19 have been cleared by Public Health and are fully recovered. Thank you to the community for your outpouring of concern and your inquiries about the students' well-being. This community is a testament to the understanding that our words and attitudes matter. By speaking and acting supportively, we encourage positive participation in testing and contact tracing and support for those who have been impacted by the virus.

UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have released a resource that includes helpful tips on the "dos and don'ts" on language when talking about the coronavirus disease. I attach it to this email so that we may continue to discuss matters related to the virus respectfully and in keeping with StFX's commitment to a safe and equitable place to live, learn and study.

Andy

**Andy W. Hakin PhD**

President and Vice-Chancellor  
St Francis Xavier University

# Tips to prevent and address social stigma associated with Covid-19



## WHAT IS SOCIAL STIGMA?

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease.

Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities. People who don't have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma.



The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviour against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus.

## WHY IS COVID-19 CAUSING SO MUCH STIGMA?

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on three main factors: 1) it is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns; 2) we are often afraid of the unknown; and 3) it is easy to associate that fear with 'others'.



It is understandable that there is confusion, anxiety, and fear among the public. Unfortunately, these factors are also fueling harmful stereotypes.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

Stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt possible social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak.

Stigma can:

- Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from seeking health care immediately
- Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviour

How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective action to help combat the disease and to avoid fueling fear and stigma. An environment needs to be created in which the disease and its impact can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly and effectively.

Here are some tips on how to address and avoid compounding, social stigma:

## **WORDS MATTER:**

When talking about coronavirus disease, certain words and language may have a negative meaning for people and fuel stigmatizing attitudes. They can perpetuate existing negative stereotypes or assumptions, strengthen false associations between the disease and other factors, create widespread fear, or dehumanize those who have the disease. This can drive people away from getting screened, tested and quarantined.

## **DOS and DON'TS**

Below are some dos and don'ts on language when talking about the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19):

**DO** talk about the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

**Don't** attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a "Wuhan Virus", "Chinese Virus" or "Asian Virus". The official name for the disease was deliberately chosen to avoid stigmatisation - the "co" stands for Corona, "vi" for virus and "d" for disease, 19 is because the disease emerged in 2019.

**DO** talk about "people who have COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", "people who are recovering from COVID-19" or "people who died after contracting COVID-19"

**Don't** refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases" or "victims"

**DO** talk about "people who may have COVID-19" or "people who are presumptive for COVID-19"

Don't - talk about "COVID-19 suspects" or "suspected cases".

**DO** talk about people "acquiring" or "contracting" COVID-19

**Don't** talk about people "transmitting COVID-19" "infecting others" or "spreading the virus" as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame. Using criminalizing or dehumanizing terminology creates the impression that those with the disease have somehow done something wrong or are less human than the rest of us, feeding stigma, undermining empathy, and potentially fueling wider reluctance to seek treatment or attend screening, testing and quarantine.

**DO** speak accurately about the risk from COVID-19, based on scientific data and latest official health advice.

**Don't** repeat or share unconfirmed rumours, and avoid using hyperbolic language designed to generate fear like "plague", "apocalypse" etc.

**DO** talk positively and emphasize the effectiveness of prevention and treatment measures. For most people this is a disease they can overcome. There are simple steps we can all take to keep ourselves, our loved ones and the most vulnerable safe.

**Remember: Facts, not fear will stop the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)**

- Share facts and accurate information about the disease.
- Challenge myths and stereotypes.
- Choose words carefully. The way we communicate can affect the attitudes of others

“Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19.” *Unicef.org*, Unicef, World Health Organization, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies , Mar. 2020, [www.unicef.org/documents/social-stigma-associated-coronavirus-disease-covid-19](http://www.unicef.org/documents/social-stigma-associated-coronavirus-disease-covid-19).