Addressing Stigma around COVID-19

Although we are seeing many acts of solidarity in the fight against COVID-19, the pandemic has also sparked a rise in stigmatization against people with certain ethnic backgrounds and those perceived to have been in contact with the virus, such as healthcare workers.

What is stigma?

A negative association about people who have an illness or disease, or who are perceived as being linked to the illness. During an outbreak such as COVID-19, stigmatization may result in people being labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated differently, and/or losing status because of their perceived link with an illness.

Examples include:

- Blaming people who may have the virus for “being careless and spreading the illness”
- Avoiding places associated with myths about the virus, such as Asian restaurants and grocers
- Verbal or physical attacks on ethnic groups or people from certain regions
- Refusing service to those who work in healthcare

Stigma hurts everyone!

It undermines social cohesion in our communities through the creation of fear or anger towards others. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling an outbreak in our communities.

How to reduce stigma

1. **Be careful of the language you use.**
   Don’t attach locations or ethnicity to the disease - it is not the “Wuhan Virus”, “Chinese Virus” or “Asian Virus”. The official name of COVID-19 was deliberately chosen to avoid stigmatization. Avoid using negative, dehumanizing terms when referring to people who have contracted the virus – do not refer to people as “victims”, “COVID-19 cases” or “COVID-19 suspects”.

2. **Be cautious about the images you share online.**
   Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes. All materials should show diverse communities being impacted and working together to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

3. **Stay informed with facts from credible sources.**
   Stigma can be heightened by insufficient knowledge or misinformation about the virus. Look to sources such as the Public Health Agency of Canada or the World Health Organization for information and facts about the virus.
CORRECT MISCONCEPTIONS AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST STIGMATIZING BEHAVIOURS.
Remember that it is facts - not fear - that will stop the spread of COVID-19. Just make sure to choose your words carefully when responding to others, since the way you communicate can affect the attitudes of others.

FOCUS ON POSITIVES.
Such as the steps being taken to contain the virus and the preventative measures we can all take to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.

RESPECT PEOPLE’S PRIVACY.
There is no need to tell others if someone you know has contracted the virus, is experiencing symptoms or is seeking healthcare.

COMMUNICATE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THOSE WHO ARE ON THE FRONTLINES.
These people continue to perform courageous work and are essential in making sure the virus does not spread further.

Let’s Support Our Community Heroes

The County of Dufferin is incredibly grateful for all our healthcare workers, emergency responders, and frontline workers. Thank you for everything you are doing to keep our communities safe!

WE TAKE A STAND AGAINST STIGMA IN OUR COMMUNITIES!
If you have been affected by stigma, please reach out to someone you trust, and talk about how you are feeling. You are not alone.

REFERENCES