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## Roles of Health Education and Promotion in Combating Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This study was carried to assess the roles of health education and promotion in Nigeria. Coronaviruses belong to a large family of viruses causing a wide spectrum of illness, ranging from very mild i.e. Common cold to severe illness such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). In early August 2020, there were nearly 18 million confirmed cases of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), including 686,145 deaths globally; very rapid growth in prevalence since the first case was reported to the World Health Organization in December 2019 (WHO, 2020). In a desperate attempt to contain the further spread of the virus, governments across the world have taken public health interventions that are unprecedented. To prevent the further spread of COVID-19 infection, many countries have taken strict measures such as the complete lockdown of a country restricting the movement of people in public, forcing people to stay at home except for emergencies and certain essential jobs. At the same time countries are also trying to scale up their testing capacity and expand their contact tracing system while scientists around the world are in a race to develop a vaccine against the virus as well as drugs to alleviate its symptoms. It is well-known that public health education plays a crucial role in the prevention and control of emerging infectious diseases, but how health providers should advise families and parents to obtain health education information is a challenging question. With COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) spreading around the world, this rapid review aims to answer that question and thus to promote evidence-based decision making in health education policy and practice

**Keywords:** SARS-CoV, WHO, Nigeria, Corona Virus, Health Education, COVID 19, Pandemic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Coronaviruses belong to a large family of viruses causing a wide spectrum of illness, ranging from very mild i.e. Common cold to severe illness such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Numerous other coronaviruses circulate among animals, including camels and some bat species. Rarely, some animal coronaviruses can evolve to cause illness in people. Sometimes coronaviruses may develop the ability to spread from person to person, for example MERS-CoV which was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012, and the SARS-CoV, first recognized in China in 2002. The COVID-19 is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. The actual source of the COVID-19 has not been established but is suspected to have been transmitted from snakes to humans. The novel Coronavirus is transmitted from human to human through droplets and direct or close personal contact with an infected individual. There is no evidence of airborne transmission in the community. There is no evidence of maternal fetal transmission as only one woman infected with the novel Coronavirus delivered a coronavirus-free baby. Health-care workers have frequently been infected while treating patients with suspected or confirmed novel Coronavirus. This has occurred through close contact with patients when infection control precautions are not strictly practiced.

Several countries have demonstrated that COVID-19 transmission from one person to another can be controlled. These actions have saved lives and have provided the rest of the world with more time to prepare for the arrival of COVID19: to ready emergency response systems; to increase capacity to detect and care for patients; to ensure hospitals have the necessary staff, supplies, structure and system; and to develop life-saving medical interventions. Even as transmission dynamics change as the pandemic evolves, every country should continue to take all necessary measures to slow further spread, to avoid their health systems becoming overwhelmed, and to prevent infection among elderly and persons with co-morbidities who are at higher risk of severe outcomes, including death.

## 2. ROLE OF HEALTH EDUCATION AND PROMOTION DURING COVID-19

Pandemic crisis, health education and promotion becomes more important than ever to support the health and well-being of people in our communities. We agree with Van den Broucke (2020) that the real heroes in the fight against COVID-19 are: “virologists, epidemiologists, doctors and nurses, and even if many of the actions taken serve a preventative purpose, their focus is on the prevention of disease, not on promoting health.” Health promotion activities aimed at improving access to better information and services plays a vital role in giving people more control over their health and well-being. Health promotion can make an essential contribution to fighting a global pandemic such as COVID-19. In modern societies, new public health approaches are needed that are adapted to local situations and needs. Since there is no vaccine available against COVID-19, the infection has been circulating rapidly within the population.




Hence, the only measure that we can adapt at the moment is to prevent its further spread within the communities. Some of the preventive measures such as social distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing face masks and avoiding direct contact with sick people or suspected Covid-19 cases could reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection (Tamang et al., 2020). However, translating these measures into daily practice is a big challenge (Lee & Chuh, 2010). Hence, appropriate and timely health prevention messages could act as a catalyst in preventing the spread of COVID-19 infection whilst health promotion will allow people to gain or regain over their health and well-being. As a discipline within public health and a field of professional practice, health promotion can contribute to addressing the COVID-19 threat at different levels, some of which are discussed here.


### 2.1 Improving Preventing Behaviour

Since COVID-19 is a new disease, the only measures that can help to prevent the further spread of disease is the containment of the virus. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, health authorities issued warnings and recommendations through different platforms such as television, infographics in social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.


**PREVENTION  
CORONAVIRUS**




**WASH YOUR HANDS**  
Wash them often, with water and lots of soap. Wash at least 20 seconds.




**SNEEZING/ COUGHING  
ETIQUETTE**  
Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, with a tissue or the inside of your elbow



**EYES, NOSE, MOUTH**  
Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus can enter your body and can make you sick.



**IF YOU'RE SICK**  
if you have a flu-like illness, inform the people around you. If your illness isn't mild, seek medical care.



MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES  
DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS



This was often followed by imposing legal restrictions on the movement of people, which has resulted in some degree of success in containing the virus (Van den Broucke. 2020). However, changing people's behaviour as well as their perception takes time. A significant number of people didn't follow the restrictions because they believed that they are at low or no risks, or simply underestimated the seriousness of the problem. Hence, changing people's behaviour requires encouraging people to adopt preventive behaviours in their day to day practice by presenting them with a clear rationale.

We also need to remember that there are likely to be unintended consequences of preventative measures. For example, as Mahato and colleagues (2020) pointed out interventions such as social distancing, (self-)isolation and quarantine can itself result in increased isolation of vulnerable people who are in an abusive home, and hence decreased levels of well-being. Everybody has a key role to play in the prevention of COVID-19, but health promotion looks at the bigger picture to ensure people's well-being is not negatively affected by general COVID19 preventative measures. So, the health promotion messages and information should be designed in a way that is understandable to the general public but the interventions should also be appropriate and acceptable to the relevant subgroups in the population

## **2.2 Empowering the Organisation and Community**

One of the important ways to empower community during public health emergencies, such as flooding, an earthquake or the COVID-19 pandemic, is to effectively engage in risk communication. Working with national authorities and organisations such as the WHO, the public can be educated about this disease using multiple communication techniques such as social media, mass media (radio, TV, billboards) and stakeholder and community engagement (WHO Africa 2020). Providing clear guidance on risk, prevention and awareness of symptoms to the communities in partnership with local organisations and community-based programming is the key (Alton Mackey 2020). Empowering communities means educating people and encouraging them to change their behaviour for their own benefit but also that of others, in order to minimise the spread of COVID-19, but also to provide the resources and opportunities to make such changes.

## **3. HEALTH EDUCATION, HEALTH IITERACY**

Many organisations around the world have emphasised on health education and information sharing on COVID-19 in different ways. For example, the WHO, one of the key actors during this COVID-19 pandemic, is providing information to the public, health sector and governments on prevention and control practices. Similarly, in local context, United States Centers for Disease Control (US CDC) and Health Education England have been disseminating health education materials including educational videos, e-learning resources and webinars on their websites (Gray et al., 2020; NHS Health Education England 2020). Studies have proposed that personalised health education intervention to the public provides a greater degree of lifestyle change thus decreasing serious course of infection (ClinicalTrials.gov 2020). Similarly, video-based entertainment educational approach has been proposed to educate schoolchildren, with an engaging and informative story line, emphasising correct hand washing procedures and the social distancing measures (Gray et al., 2020).



#### 4. DEALING WITH MIS/DISINFORMATION

As the virus keeps on spreading so does the risk of misinformation and false information which the WHO described as an 'infodemic'. When there is a lot of false or inaccurate information about the virus, its origin and effects as well as about the action of authorities to tackle the pandemic, it is difficult for many people to find reliable sources of information and guidance they might need to interpret the information provided. Whether the misinformation is profit or politically motivated, it is important to protect the general public from false information regarding COVID-19. The scientist can help in their own ways by calling out fake stories and engaging with the public. Besides by countering misinformation about COVID-19 by scientists, they can help policymakers avoid introducing harmful policies, improve public understanding of the pandemic and save lives (Fleming 2020). Since social media can become a gateway for the spread of misinformation some of the ways to fight misinformation are by sharing correct information, providing links to correct information, and sharing information only from credible sources such as WHO or US CDC (Campbell 2020).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

As governments around the world struggle to use a range of prevention strategies, from imposing lockdowns to scaling up testing and contact tracing, one effective way to support the health and well-being of the general public is through health education and promotion. Community education and risk communication carried out by organisations at different levels and engagement of locals in order to understand the risk and seriousness of COVID-19 is what health promotion can offer. The main aim thus is to encourage behaviour change among the general people that will help them adapt helpful behaviours in this long fight against COVID-19.

#### 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcome of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Government should provide employ more health educators so as to curb the spread of covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria with health education
- Provision of soap and water for hand washing hygiene to all departments
- Enforcement of facemask usage on all workers and passengers within the airport premises.
- provision of large capacity of room with adequate ventilation and humiliation so as to maintain social distances among students while in lecture room
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. This eliminates germs including viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least a 1-metre distance between yourself and others to reduce your risk of infection when they cough, sneeze or speak. Maintain an even greater distance between yourself and others when indoors. The further away, the better.



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