

**COVID-19 REPORTING IN KENYA:
A SAFETY GUIDELINE FOR
JOURNALISTS.**

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PROTECT
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ARTICLE 19

Free Word Centre
60 Farringdon Road
London EC1R 3GA
United Kingdom

T: +44 20 7324 2500

F: +44 20 7490 0566

E: info@article19.org

W: www.article19.org

Tw: [@article19org](https://twitter.com/article19org)

Fb: facebook.com/article19org

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PROTECT is a partnership for knowledge and learning in three countries aimed at countering shrinking civic space, easing pressure on independent media and infomediaries, and enhancing transparency through empowered, independent and informed individuals and communities who demand that governments uphold their obligations in a protective and enabling environment.

PROTECT in Kenya will strengthen and promote the ability of women in media and civil society to protect civic and media space and push for accountable and transparent governance at local and national level. In Malawi, PROTECT will focus on the lack of participation in society by marginalised groups. In Myanmar PROTECT will tackle the intolerance which has fuelled so much recent violence in the country.

Above all PROTECT will increase the freedom to enjoy free, open and inclusive societies for many and will promote societies that thrive with diverse voices.

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is an infectious illness caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The first case of the novel virus was reported in humans in Wuhan, China, in December 2019¹. Towards the end of January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency. This was later followed up by initial advice to countries on how to detect, test, and manage potential cases.

From the onset, global and local media were instrumental in providing information to people on this new disease, its spread, and its effects on society. However, media institutions and journalists face new challenges – specifically, unique health-and-safety challenges – as they attempt to gather, process, and relay information on this disease, often travelling to affected areas, and listening to accounts of those affected and infected, thereby placing their own safety in jeopardy.

The current situation requires that many vital decisions have to be made – including risk assessments – that impact implementation of various preventive measures for media workers. Deliberate effort has to be made to ensure such vital processes are undertaken with sensitivity to gender differences and that the voices of all are brought to key decision-making processes – especially those that relate to reorganisation of the workplace space, work schedules and shifts, and provision and access to certain facilities.

Some media houses, particularly the Nation Media Group, Royal Media Services, Standard Group, Radio Africa, and BBC, have introduced a number of measures to curb the spread of the virus in their newsrooms. Masks or facial coverings are now commonplace, as are regular temperature measurements and the facilities for, and encouragement to use, hand sanitiser. Journalists are now encouraged to work from home, and shifts have been introduced to reduce the number of people in the newsroom at any one time. Physical distancing is now a requirement. Online editorial and other meetings – using platforms such as Zoom, Webex, Google Hangouts, Jitsi, and Microsoft Teams, among others – have also been introduced.

These Guidelines are meant to support the safety of journalists working in Kenya, while reporting on Covid-19. They are informed by examining and adopting from other guidelines that have been developed by various organisations² around the world to aid reporters and editors in their everyday journalistic work practices and enhance accurate and safe reporting on Covid-19,³ and they include some specificities of the Kenya context.

1. See World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) Situation Report – 94, 23 April 2020, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b8304bf0_4.

2. Organisations whose guidelines have informed this one include the WHO, International Media Support (IMS), International Research and Board (IREX), UNICEF, UNESCO, Internews, Coalition for Women in Journalism Exchanges, International Journalists' Network (IJNet), A Culture Of Safety Alliance (ACOS Alliance) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) among others.

3. See UNICEF, Safety Guidelines for Journalists Reporting on Covid-19, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/india/coronavirus/safety-guidelines-journalists-reporting-covid-19>; UNESCO, Tips for journalists on Covid-19 coverage, 14 May 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/tips-journalists-covid-19-coverage>; Internews, Your Safety as a Journalist Reporting COVID-19, 13 April 2020, <https://internews.org/resource/your-safety-journalist-reporting-covid-19>; Coalition For Women in Journalism, Covid-19: A resource page for journalists, 2020, <https://womeninjournalism.org/covid19>; Committee to Protect Journalists, CPJ Safety Advisory: Covering the coronavirus pandemic, 10 February 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/02/cpj-safety-advisory-covering-the-coronavirus-outbr/>; A Culture Of Safety Alliance (ACOS Alliance), Covid-19: News Organizations Safety Protocols – Working with freelancers, 2020, https://c1a6a674-8e44-478c-a978-fc-c60843c275.usfiles.com/ugd/c1a6a6_4124138d62dc496baba9442eeeab4da2.pdf; Taylor Mulcahey, '10 tips for journalists covering Covid-19', International Journalists' Network (IJNet), 5 March 2020, <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/10-tips-journalists-covering-covid-19>.

EFFECTS OF LEGAL NOTICES AND EXECUTIVE ORDERS ON THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN KENYA.

On 13 March 2020, Kenya's country's Ministry of Health announced the first case of Covid-19 in Kenya. Subsequently, a course of action was developed and put in place to prevent the spread of the disease within the country. After the announcement by the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Mutahi Kagwe, the government introduced several measures, including restrictions on movement (both within Kenya, and to and from the country – i.e. international travel), meetings/gatherings, quarantine and isolation, and social distancing.

On 6 March, the government banned all meetings, conferences, and international events in Kenya, even though there were no reported cases of Covid-19 in the country at that point. This was shortly followed on 15 March by President Uhuru Kenyatta's order that all schools and higher learning institutions be closed by 20 March 2020. He asked people (except essential workers) to work from home. He directed that all travel from countries with any case of Covid-19 be restricted. However, he allowed Kenyans and foreigners with valid residence permits back into the country, but ordered that they proceed to self-quarantine or to go to a government-designated quarantine facility.

On 22 March, Kagwe, announced the government had suspended all international flights effective midnight on 25 March for two weeks. Only cargo flights were exempted from the order, although the crew of the flights were expected to observe strict Ministry of Health guidelines on social distancing, facial coverings, and other measures. Kagwe said that those who were arriving in Kenya before that date – whether Kenyans or foreigners – would be quarantined at a government-designated facility. This meant that anybody caught out of the country after 25 March would not have been allowed back into Kenya. On 5 April, the international flight ban was extended for another 30 days (effective 6 April, the following day). Only international flights seeking to evacuate foreign nationals and cargo flights were exempted from the order. The order was only lifted on 1 August.

In addition, the Public Order (State Curfew) Order, 2020 – issued by the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government – ordered a countrywide curfew 'during the hours of darkness between seven o'clock in the evening and five o'clock in the morning with effect from the 27th March 2020 and which was to remain in force for a period of thirty days thereof'.⁴ Media workers were, however, listed among those exempted from the curfew.

The order also prohibited public gatherings, processions, or movement either alone or as a group during the period of the curfew, except where permitted in writing by either a police officer in charge of the police in a county or a police officer in charge of a police division. In addition to the President's regular briefings, there have been numerous legal notices by different ministries and daily briefings by officials of the Ministry of Health, all aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19. It is worth mentioning that some restrictions issued earlier in March and April 2020 have been lifted. This relates particularly to inter-county travel restrictions and the curfew between 19:00 and 05:00, which was later pushed back to 21:00. On 28 September, President Kenyatta relaxed the curfew start time even further to 23:00.

4. See the Public Order (State Curfew) Order, 2020. http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/LegalNotices/2020/LN36_2020.pdf

Given the nature of information collection by journalists, and important principles relating to freedom of expression and movement, these prohibitions have had serious implications on, for example, meeting sources of information or interacting with experts who often contribute to reports. To enforce the orders, security forces have harassed or assaulted journalists (and many Kenyans). On the World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, ARTICLE 19 reported that 22 journalists had been assaulted by the police since 13 March 2020. In one case captured and aired on television, the police in Mombasa assaulted NTV journalist Peter Wainaina for covering the assault of ordinary people by the police. On March 29, police attacked Weru TV cameraperson George Muriithi for filming police officers and government administrators using violence to enforce social distancing rules on traders in Mitunguu market in Meru County. Police arrested journalists John Wanyama and Charles Kerecha of Citizen TV in Uasin Gishu for apparently violating the curfew. The same happened to Kiambu independent journalist Mukoya Aywah.

Although some of the legal notices are clear that journalists are exempted from the orders, particularly those on curfews, overzealous police, or security officers either use their positions to attack journalists or exhibit ignorance on the work of journalists. Also, orders restricting the movement of journalists and holding meetings, even though well-intentioned, affect reporting, meeting sources, and investigative work.

SECTION ONE

Journalists and Other Media Workers

This section focuses on journalists and other media workers who play an important role in gathering and packaging information for the general public. The health and safety of journalists is now of paramount importance, given the highly infectious nature of the virus and its ability to quickly spread in a given population. Journalists and other essential media workers – including drivers, make-up artists, administrators, and cleaners – have all come under increased risk. It is worth noting that media institutions – along with all everyone else – were not prepared for the health risks that have now become apparent as the virus has continued to spread. Media institutions are being forced to adapt rather quickly to the changed circumstances by instituting measures to protect core workers from exposure to the virus while on duty.

A critical start point in crafting suitable workplace policies and standard operating procedures should be the welfare of the people who do the work. In this regard, measures should be taken to aid such decision making, and here some useful guidelines are outlined.

Workplace Risk Assessment

According to the WHO, Covid-19 is primarily transmitted through respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces. Exposure to the virus can occur at any time at the workplace, during work-related travel to an area with local transmission, or during movement to and from work. Media houses are advised to carry out periodic workplace risk assessments, including a reexamination of external reporting of events and the risks they pose to teams in order to take appropriate preventive measures.

Reporting often involves travel to the field to get stories, and therefore should be considered a high-risk activity. While on assignment, reporters are, potentially, in close contact with other people, as well as with objects and surfaces that could be contaminated with the virus. Measures to protect them (outlined later in this guide) should be guided by this consideration. A comprehensive risk assessment should cover all aspects of the workplace, including gender-related concerns, in terms of how certain tasks are structured and performed to ensure that interventions and measures taken internally are sensitive to both genders.

Such assessment should be done periodically in order to constantly monitor the workplace situation and to address any potential risks as they emerge. Areas to be covered in the workplace assessment may include:

- Identification of clinically vulnerable people;
- Work patterns/shifts, breaks during the day and potential changes;
- Studios and studio operations;
- Crews and deployments – how many people should be on any given assignment, including use of local correspondents to reduce travel;
- Newsroom sitting arrangements;
- Equipment handling and storage; and
- Hygiene measures, including provision of water and soap, and/or alcohol-based hand sanitisers at vantage points in the workplace.

Vulnerable People

Special consideration should be made in respect to older people and those with chronic conditions, including pregnant mothers, when assigning reporting duties. According to the WHO and Kenya's Ministry of Health recommendations, older people and individuals with chronic conditions are considered high risk. Editorial departments should ensure a thorough and comprehensive record of staff who require such protection before deployment. Staff who fall into this high-risk category should consider not participating in certain assignments if the risk of exposure is significant. In this regard, media institutions should:

- Put in place measures to confirm the current health status of staff, in relation to Covid-19, and have in place a procedure to regularly check their status;
- Avoid tasking individuals who are self-isolating, unless this is done remotely without compromising their health, isolation, or the safety of the rest of the team;
- Be aware of colleagues developing symptoms at the workplace. If this happens, they should quickly go home and then inform their line editorial managers. Those who have come into contact with them at the workplace should be traced and given relevant advice;
- Advise clinically vulnerable individuals to maintain social distance at all times if they cannot work from home. Their participation in any team activities should be assessed prior and discussed with line managers; and
- Ensure contributors, including television commentators, are also protected. If they cannot be interviewed remotely, then they have to sit in hygienically safe spaces that have been sanitised. Communicate with contributors in advance about mandatory Covid-19 requirements and checks before filming or appearance on television shows.

Standard Recommendations

These standard recommendations have been compiled from various sources, including the Committee to Protect Journalists, ⁵which was among the first organisations to develop recommendations for journalists. The recommendations offered include:

- Avoiding close contact with anybody with symptoms of respiratory illness, such as coughing and sneezing;
- Sanitising or washing hands regularly with hot water and soap. Warm or hot water is recommended. Journalists are advised to wash their hands thoroughly with hot water and soap before, during, and after leaving an affected area;
- Using protective gloves when working in or visiting an infected site such as a medical treatment facility;
- Not touching surfaces that may be contaminated with animal droppings;
- If and when operating in a health facility, market, or farm, never placing equipment on the floor, and always decontaminating equipment;
- If working in an affected health facility, market, or farm, using disposable footwear or waterproof overshoes; wipe/rinse these off as soon as you exit the location;
- Avoiding proximity to and/or entering an animal pen, or the cage of large/unpredictable animals, and seeking medical advice as soon as possible if bitten by any animals;

5. Committee to Protect Journalists, CPJ Safety Advisory: Covering the Coronavirus Pandemic, <https://cpj.org/2020/02/cpj-safety-advisory-covering-the-coronavirus-outbr/>.

- If one develops symptoms, especially fever or shortness of breath, they should immediately seek medical treatment; self-quarantine is recommended to prevent infecting others; and
- Journalists are advised to always follow health authorities' guidance and instructions when visiting or covering areas suspected or infected by the virus.

Psychological Impact of Covid-19

Experience so far shows that the Covid-19 pandemic continues to present a heavy psychological burden on those who are involved at the frontlines. Journalists are among those who are heavily affected, especially when they have to report stories from affected zones and localities, or even isolation centres and health facilities where Covid-19 patients are being treated. Lead editors should consider the potential psychological impact of reporting from an area affected by Covid-19. This may apply in instances where reporters are required to report from a medical or isolation facility or quarantine zone. There are a few things that can be done to maintain the psychological and mental health of staff:

- People may experience anxiety. Be on the lookout to see that all team members are coping, especially after visits to heavily affected areas or Covid-19 treatment facilities;
- Provide necessary information and opportunities for all team members to ask any questions related to any assignment; and
- Plan for periodic trauma briefings if teams are working on traumatic content, or in the unfortunate case of colleagues being infected with the coronavirus or even loss of a colleague(s).

SECTION TWO

Vital Preparations/Planning

Pre-Assignment Planning and Preventive Measures

Preventive measures should be a priority during all planning and deployment processes, especially those that relate to field-reporting assignments. The following pre-assignment planning guidelines have been sourced from the Committee to Protect Journalists, WHO, and the US-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), whose work we have borrowed in the preparation of these Guidelines. The following points should be observed:

- Journalists should carefully consider the assignments of people who fall into high-risk categories. This is because, according to the CDC, individuals with chronic health conditions and older people are considered high risk. This includes people suffering from serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease. You should carefully consider the assignment if the risk of exposure is high.
- Regularly check the status of any event you might be attending, especially in countries with significant Covid-19 risks. A number of countries have imposed restrictions on people travelling from certain countries, and journalists are advised to regularly seek information from organisations such as WHO before deciding where to go for assignment. Journalists may be subjected to testing and quarantine in some areas, and they should always be aware of that this may happen without notice.
- Check the status of events or location you may be planning to visit, especially in respect to safety regulations instituted by the state or local authorities. In some instances, local authorities or the state may prohibit entry or exit from certain affected zones. In this regard, special permits for the media and other essential workers may be required to gain entry into such places. To keep up to date, journalists covering the outbreak should monitor the WHO, the CDC, and the Ministry of Health.
- Do not travel if you are sick or exhibiting Covid-19 related symptoms. Check and make available essential information by the WHO on the virus, including symptoms and how it spreads. This information should be made available to all teams that are likely to travel or report on external events.
- Ensure relevant vaccinations are up to date before travelling to a country affected by the virus.
- If visiting a facility or location, enquire about the hygiene measures put in place by local authorities, and whether special PPE is required.
- Ensure there is sufficient or available support before going on assignment to areas with possible cases of the virus or danger of being infected.
- Make sure you have sufficient suppliers of important things like face masks, hand sanitisers, and soap.
- Carefully consider the potential psychological impact of reporting on Covid-19. This is because of the potential harm caused by exposure to the suffering of those infected or affected. A useful resource for media workers covering traumatic situations can be found via the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.⁶

⁶ See Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, Covering Coronavirus: Resources for journalists, 28 February 2020, <https://dartcenter.org/resources/covering-coronavirus-resources-journalists>.

- Discuss with family members and friends before taking up assignments. The discussions should focus on risks and their concerns.

Travel Planning

- Journalists should have a contingency plan in place due to potential lockdowns or other measures that may be taken by authorities in their bid to contain Covid-19 and other threats.
- Journalists should never travel if sick. Your health, and that of others, is often more important than a story. You may also face forced testing and enforced quarantine.
- If possible, buy fully refundable flight tickets. Many airlines have had to cancel their schedules due to Covid-19, which may cause significant financial distress for you and your family.
- Check whether your health and travel insurance policy are valid to ensure coverage in case of threats or infection.
- Make sure you check which countries have imposed travel bans, enforced quarantine, and/or 14 days' health monitoring on arrival for certain nationalities. This will reduced the stress or disappointments that may result as a consequence of forced testing and enforced quarantine.
- Some countries require a medical certificate to prove you are Covid-19 free. Check whether the country you seek to travel to has such a requirement.
- Be ready for flight delays and cancellations due to Covid-19 emergencies. Have flexible itineraries and allow additional time at airports.
- Always monitor news to know the situation in the countries or locations you want to travel to.

On-Assignment Preventive Measure

While on assignment – whether it is a visit to an affected area or interviews with different groups of people – reporters could potentially come into contact with the virus. Several measures should be taken to ensure they are protected while carrying out an assignment. Some things to keep in mind are outlined as follows:

- Journalists should always ensure they do not come into close contact with those infected or those who show symptoms. They should always wear face masks or face covering, sanitise or wash their hands regularly. Physical distancing – at least at least 1.5 metres – is also highly recommended.
- Consider conducting interviews in an open area. If this is not possible, keep a safe distance between yourself and the interviewee.
- To ensure safe distance between you and the subject, consider use of a boom microphone.
- Always sanitise your equipment, including microphones.
- Sanitise or wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with water and soap before, during, and after leaving an affected area.
- Urgently seek medical advice or treatment if you develop symptoms, especially fever or shortness of breath. Self-quarantine to prevent infecting others is recommended.
- Always follow national health guidelines and instructions.

Working in the Newsrooms

Ordinarily, journalists and other media house workers spend huge amounts of time in the newsroom and studios. Safety preventive measures should be instituted to limit opportunities for exposure to and spread

of Covid-19. Generally, decisions to close or reopen workplaces, suspension, or even downscaling of work activities should be based on a proper risk assessment, as well as recommendations of national authorities. However, several workplace measures should be undertaken to ensure constant protection. The WHO has designated a number of workplace measures for preventing Covid-19, and these should apply to all workers such as managers, reporters, editors, cleaners, administrative support staff, etc. They include the following:

- Staff should be encouraged to work from home. If this is not possible, try and keep the same teams together to avoid especially high-risk individuals coming into contact with many people. Implement shift or split-team arrangements if possible.
- Plan the work space such that people do not face each other. Back-to-back or side-to-side sitting arrangements are recommended.
- Physical distance should always be maintained. At least 1.5 metres physical distance is recommended. The number of people in a newsroom in any given time should be controlled.
- Avoid physical contact. Hugging, touching, shaking hands are not recommended.
- Minimise physical contact with sources. Online interviews should be considered instead.
- If possible, stagger breaks, including tea breaks, lunch, etc. to minimise physical contacts.
- Sanitising or washing hands regularly with hot water and soap. Journalists are advised to wash their hands thoroughly with hot water and soap before, during, and after leaving an affected area.

Working in Studios

Several preventive measures should be taken to ensure safety of workers in studios. These may include:

- Handwashing should be undertaken before entering the studio and on completion of production tasks. Studio and floor managers should regularly remind crew of the need for regular hand washing. Alcohol-based hand sanitisers should be made available in the studios.
- Consider working with a reduced crew to ensure adequate physical distancing requirements in the studios.
- Keep time in the studio to a minimum.
- Modify the set design to reduce the requirements for close working.
- Display appropriate signage on symptoms of Covid-19 and explanations of when not to come into work.

Equipment and Preventive Measures

- If possible, people should have dedicated personal work equipment. However, all equipment – for example, microphones, faders, keyboards, and touch screens, among others – should constantly be wiped down before and after use with alcohol-based sanitisers.
- Remote editing should be employed to help reduce numbers and avoid physical contact.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Face Coverings

Covid-19 related risks at the workplace can be managed with the use of face coverings, hygiene (hand washing and regular sanitising of surfaces), social distancing, and – as much as possible – maintaining fixed teams if individuals cannot work from home. In cases where teams are visiting high-risk areas

such as treatment and quarantine places, the use of PPE is required. All PPE should be used correctly, and crew should be given adequate instructions on how to put them on, use, and discard. PPEs such as hand gloves and face masks are single use. If you do wear a mask, you should follow this advice:

- Always wear a face covering. There are many available masks in the market at the moment. An N95 mask is recommended over a standard surgical mask. Cotton/gauze masks are not recommended.
- The mask should cover the nose and chin. Do not reuse masks.
- Do not touch the mask, especially the inside part. Remove it by using the straps. Replace the mask with a new clean, dry mask as soon as it becomes damp/humid. Dispose of them safely and immediately after taking them off.
- Sanitising or washing hands regularly with hot water and soap. Warm or hot water is recommended. Journalists are advised to wash their hands thoroughly with hot water and soap before, during, and after leaving an affected area.
- Remember that use of a mask is only one part of personal protection. Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.

Post-Assignment Preventive Measures

- Seek urgent medical attention if you develop symptoms within 14 days of return from assignment. Self-isolate or quarantine to minimise the risk of infecting others.
- Let your employer know if suffering from symptoms for appropriate action or interventions.
- Avoid meeting colleagues if suffering symptoms or suspect you may have been infected.
- Consider remote working or work from home after returning from an assignment.

SECTION THREE

Journalistic Integrity, Roles, and Responsibilities

Understanding Roles, Responsibilities, and Journalistic Integrity

It is important for the media and journalists to understand their roles and responsibilities. This entails, for example, understanding that they are at the forefront of dealing with the pandemic and presenting credible, reliable, and trustworthy information that is relevant to the needs of society. This means journalists and the media must understand professional ethics. For example, it is important for journalists to be objective, impartial, and respect privacy. The media and journalist should avoid causing fear and anxiety by sticking to fact, and reporting accurately and impartially. They must stick to the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya that stipulates how issues of great public interest should be covered⁷. It is important to note that the media has a significant impact on society, and thus, the way journalists cover and frame Covid-19 pandemic issues must always be carefully considered. In essence, journalists should avoid covering issues in ways that may stigmatise not only the patients and survivors but also relations of those suffering from the pandemic or who have lost someone. They should stick to the story, avoid speculation and attempts to make up facts or create impressions that are misleading and/or false.

Public Interest

This means promoting the welfare or wellbeing of the general public and society instead of, for example, focusing on issues that touch only on the elite in society, or those capable of only generating greater interest in the media house, ratings, circulation, or revenue. Reports should be carefully considered, and balanced between what is interesting and the needs and sensitivities of the people affected both directly and indirectly by the pandemic.

Focus on Facts

'All truths – even the laws of science – are subject to revision, but we operate by them in the meantime because they are necessary and they work. [Journalism seeks] a practical and functional form of truth ... truths by which we can operate on a day-to-day basis,' Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel write in the book *The Elements of Journalism*⁸. It goes then without saying that the first obligation is to tell the truth about Covid-19. They should not delve too much on side shows and 'alternative' truths offered by people with little knowledge and experience in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and related issues. Journalists should point media consumers to authoritative and credible information sources and resources.

Accuracy

Accuracy is the heart of good journalism and determines the quality of the news and other media content on Covid-19. Therefore, it is important to report on various issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic as accurately and truthfully as possible.

7. See Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, <https://www.mediacouncil.or.ke/en/mck/index.php/code-of-conduct-for-the-practice-of-journalism-in-kenya>.

8. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2014.

Accuracy means getting the facts, names, places, etc. right, and thus prevents the spread of “fake news”, disinformation, and misinformation. Journalists should ensure that they check and recheck or confirm/corroborate information to ensure it is factual.

They should know about and access various online fact-checking and verification services and use them when in doubt. Journalists should also have reliable and credible sources on whom they rely for truthful and accurate information. ‘When in doubt, leave it out’ is an important dictum in good journalism. Any journalist covering Covid-19 and related issues should stick to facts and report accurately and fairly. Fairness in this context means giving anybody adversely mentioned in any report a chance to respond to the issues in a story. And as the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya demands, any inaccurate, misleading, or distorted story must be corrected promptly. This also means that corrections only present the correct information and not restate the error ‘except when clarity demands’⁹.

Balance

As the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya says, reports should always be balanced.¹⁰ This means balancing between the pros and cons of issues relating to Covid-19. This also means giving different issues space in the media for people to understand the pandemic, and the different challenges it presents. A good balance is important and offer people from various backgrounds and experiences the space and opportunity to air their views. The views of those infected, those who have recovered and others in society are important to media coverage of the pandemic and its effects.

Diversity

Diversity in the media is important. This means offering people from different backgrounds, gender and other considerations to air their views/opinions or experiences on the pandemic. It is clear that Covid-19 affects, for example, the young and old, different ethnic groups, and men and women differently. Factors such as age, health, economic status, religious, and cultural beliefs are also important in the coverage of the pandemic. In short, the stories should reflect the diversity inherent in Kenya for greater understanding of the disease and its consequences. The media should actively seek out women’s stories and perspectives. The same applies to minorities and different vulnerable groups.

According to Emma Lygnerud Boberg, International Media Support (IMS) Global Response Department Gender Adviser, the ‘media has the power to amplify the voices of women, portray their active roles in in the Corona crisis, support their participation in public debate, challenge gender stereotypes and hold decision-makers accountable for women rights. Media should provide a diverse account of the needs, perspectives and voices in society.’¹¹

9. See Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, <https://www.mediacouncil.or.ke/en/mck/index.php/code-of-conduct-for-the-practice-of-journalism-in-kenya>.

10. See Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, <https://www.mediacouncil.or.ke/en/mck/index.php/code-of-conduct-for-the-practice-of-journalism-in-kenya>.

11. International Media Support Media, Remember Gender in Your COVID-19 Coverage, 2020, <https://www.mediasupport.org/news/media-remember-gender-in-your-covid-19-coverage/>

To promote female voices in the media, the IMS recommends that:

- Staff and colleagues be reminded that gender sensitivity is a priority in Covid-19 coverage and should share recommendations, good examples and knowledge on the gendered implications of the crisis in an email or working group;
- Editors or managers should be notified if women's perspectives are not represented in articles or reports;
- Content be monitored by gender to ensure journalists know who is represented and how. This will reduce the imbalance in gender representation;
- Journalists create or expand their database of women experts on different aspects of Covid-19 and the challenges related to it;
- Journalists should always seek women's stories as well as men's, use gender neutral language and be cautious of stereotypes; and
- Journalists should broaden their perspectives by consulting expert organisations and opinions on the different gendered impacts of Covid-19. This would ensure a fair and accurate portrayal of the crisis.¹²

Context

Good storytelling and reporting provide context. It is important for journalists to understand that while anything can be news, not everything is newsworthy. Finding interesting information, including background information and facts, and presenting it in a way that engages the audience is important to the coverage of Covid-19. Providing background information is important as various audiences need to fully understand the information to appreciate the issues on Covid-19. Context is also important if people are to understand the latest developments in the ongoing or evolving story as it provides a clearer picture, perspective, and deeper or better understanding of Covid-19 – the origin, causes, consequences, etc. of the story.

Language

The language used should be as simple as possible for everyone's understanding. Reports should try to avoid jargon. Good reports about Covid-19 require that the issues are broken down so that people who are not experts or those without medical background can easily understand the reports. However, journalists should avoid deliberate oversimplification of content to avoid misleading people about Covid-19. The reports should be relevant and make sense to people who access the information or reports. In addition, the language should not stigmatise people, including those infected, who are recovering or those who have recovered, and their families and friends.

Respect for Privacy

Journalists should respect the privacy of patients. This is especially important because of the apparent stigma associated with the disease. As the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya says, 'the public's right to know shall be weighed against the privacy rights of people in the news'.¹³

12. International Media Support Media, Remember Gender in Your COVID-19 Coverage, 2020, <https://www.mediasupport.org/news/media-remember-gender-in-your-covid-19-coverage/>

13. See Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, <https://www.mediacouncil.or.ke/en/mck/index.php/code-of-conduct-for-the-practice-of-journalism-in-kenya>.

It is recommended that journalists or content should never use people's names, images, or identify material without their permission. Consent should be sought from people to protect their privacy. This includes those who have willingly offered their experiences or stories. However, high-profile individuals who reveal publicly they have been personally affected by Covid-19 can be deemed to have given their permission.

Sources

Journalists should understand that credible and authoritative sources of information are important to their work. They should always ask themselves whether the sources of information possess the knowledge and experience necessary and whether the information they offer is driven by the interest to inform the public, or by malice or other vested interest.

Journalists should talk to as many different people as possible although the credibility, knowledge, experience, and authority of those sources should be carefully considered. The IMS advises journalists to seek the view of experts with relevant credentials or knowledge and skills. They should not, however, rely only on experts and official sources, as people from different backgrounds, based on, for example, gender, countries of origin, social status, etc. will have different experiences. In addition, journalists should also strive to talk to more than one expert, given the fact that diversity requires people with different expertise who will see the disease from different angles. For accuracy, journalists should always seek the latest information and data given the changing nature of the disease and threats.

Focus on Reporting, Not Analysis

Journalists should strive to provide accurate reports of the issues that are devoid of speculation. Although it is clear that the pandemic has caused widespread disruptions and had huge consequences on issues such as the economy, employment, health, and others, the picture is sometimes not supported by empirical evidence. There is a lot of interesting and relevant information to report instead of speculating on the consequences. If opinions are used, it should be backed by data and expert analysis.

Misinformation and Disinformation

Avoid misinformation and disinformation. Although the two words are often used interchangeably, they should be seen differently, especially because intent is important in their definition and application to journalism.

Misinformation is often defined as false or inaccurate information, including false rumours, that is spread to mislead. Disinformation is broadly defined as false information that is deliberately misleading or biased and meant to manipulate narratives or facts. It can also be seen as propaganda.

Headlines

Headlines should reflect the content in the stories. They should not be sensational. Editors should particularly avoid using emotive headlines such as 'killer disease' and 'catastrophe' that could contribute to a sense of growing panic, fear, and anxiety in society. Misleading and sensationalist headlines should be avoided.

Figures

The figures must always be accurate. Given the daily announcement of figures of infections, recovery, and deaths, it is important that figures should be accurate and their source credible and reliable. Although data journalism is on the rise, and numbers are important in reporting, journalists should always be sceptical, and more analytical. Numbers should be rigorously interrogated and sources carefully considered.

Tribal Tropes and Stereotypes

Tribal stereotypes are common in Kenya, and the media and journalists continue to reproduce ethnic and racial stereotypes. This is often harmful, especially when media representation of certain ethnic or racial groups is negative. The often-repeated reference of Covid-19 as the “China virus” or “China disease” has had and continues to have harmful effects. Journalists should guard against such ethnic and racial tropes and stereotypes.

Gender Stereotypes

There are numerous common stereotypes in Kenya. The media, particularly social media, is awash with content that stereotype and demean women based on their gender and their roles in society. The description of women as the weaker sex and thus vulnerable, and content on their socially prescribed care roles and hygiene behaviour are regularly published online and on social media. Journalists should thus avoid using images, sources, and story angles that re-enforce gender stereotypes or demean their roles in society.

Interviews

Interviews are important to media and journalists because they offer an opportunity to interrogate ideas and sources of information. However, the efficacy of interviews is majorly determined by how well-prepared journalists are and the questions they ask. In essence, it is fundamentally important that journalists conducting interviews should be well-prepared by reading widely, and researching and preparing adequately. They should take care to research the experts interviewed and their views. As Dr Stephen Morse, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University, advises, ‘the problem is not just finding a good expert ... it’s finding people who are going to be sufficiently able to distance themselves from their own biases – or declare their own biases – because we all have a bias.’¹⁴ Using biased, unverifiable and sensational information, and asking irrelevant and meaningless questions – particularly in live interviews – may lead to “fake news” and misinformation. Media houses should employ fact-checking strategies to help correct any misinformation or false information offered by interviewees.

Photography and Illustrations

Photography, illustrations, and visualisations should be accurate and avoid stoking or fuelling fear and anxiety. Think about whether any picture used is relevant to the story and whether people are likely to misinterpret the pictures. In other words, photographs and illustrations should accurately portray what is going on and be used responsibly. Photojournalists should avoid sensational photography.

14. Taylor Mulcahey, ‘10 Tips for journalists covering COVID-19’, International Journalists’ Network (IJNet), 5 March 2020, <https://ijn.net.org/en/story/10-tips-journalists-covering-covid-19>.

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Q&A ON CORONAVIRUSES (COVID-19)

The information below is obtained from the WHO website and the Kenya's Public Health Act. For up-to-date guidance/laws you can check both the WHO and the Ministry of Health websites

What is a Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease Covid-19.

What is Covid-19?

Covid-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What Are the Symptoms of Covid-19?

The most common symptoms of Covid-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell. Most people (about 80 percent) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around one out of every five people who get Covid-19 become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems, or diabetes, are more likely to develop a serious illness. People with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How Does Covid-19 Spread?

People can catch Covid-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are spread when a person with Covid-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch Covid-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. People can also catch Covid-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person infected with the disease who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 metre (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

Can Covid-19 Be Caught from a Person Who Has No Symptoms?

The main way the disease spreads is through respiratory droplets expelled by someone who is coughing. The risk of catching Covid-19 from someone with no symptoms at all is very low. However, many people with Covid-19 experience only mild symptoms. This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is therefore possible to catch Covid-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill. WHO is assessing ongoing research on the period of transmission of Covid-19 and will continue to share updated findings.

Can I Catch Covid-19 from the Faeces of Someone With the Disease?

The risk of catching Covid-19 from the faeces of an infected person appears to be low. While initial investigations suggest the virus may be present in faeces in some cases, being spread through this route is not a main feature of the outbreak. WHO is assessing ongoing research on the ways Covid-19 is spread and will continue to share new findings. Because this is a risk, however, it is another reason to clean hands regularly, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.

How Long Does It Take for Symptoms of the Covid-19 to Appear?

Symptoms of Covid-19 may appear in as few as two days, or as long as 14 days after exposure. This is based on what has been seen previously as the incubation period of viruses. There are isolated reports of individuals transmitting the infection to others before they develop symptoms. To be cautious, many governments are requiring an isolation period of 14 days for people returning from endemic areas.

What Can I Do to Protect Myself and Prevent the Spread of Disease?

Protection measures for everyone

Stay aware of the latest information on the Covid-19 outbreak, available on the WHO website and through your national and local public health authority. Many countries around the world have seen cases of Covid-19 and several have seen outbreaks. Authorities in China and some other countries have succeeded in slowing or stopping their outbreaks. However, the situation is unpredictable so check regularly for the latest news.

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading Covid-19 by taking some simple precautions:

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. This kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least one metre (three feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the Covid-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, you can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose, or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, disposing of the used tissue immediately. Droplets spread the virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu, and Covid-19.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention, and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority. National and local authorities will have the most up-to-date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

- Keep up to date on the latest Covid-19 hotspots (cities or local areas where Covid-19 is spreading widely). If possible, avoid travelling to places – especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart, or lung disease. You have a higher chance of catching Covid-19 in one of these areas.

Protection measures for persons who are in or have recently visited (past 14 days) areas where Covid-19 is spreading

- Follow the guidance outlined above in Protection measures for everyone.
- Self-isolate by staying at home if you begin to feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as a headache, low grade fever (37.3 C or above) and slight runny nose, until you recover. If it is essential for you to have someone bring you supplies or to go out, for example to buy food, then wear a mask to avoid infecting other people. Reducing contact with others and avoiding visits to medical facilities will allow these facilities to operate more effectively and help protect you and others from possible infection from Covid-19 and other viruses.
- If you develop a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call in advance and tell your provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers. This will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. It will also help to prevent possible spread of Covid-19 and other viruses.

Should I Wear a Mask to Protect Myself?

Wear a mask. Under the Kenya Gazette Supplement No 41, it is mandatory to wear a mask while in public space. Disposable face masks can only be used once. If you are not ill or looking after someone who is ill, then you are wasting a mask. There is a world-wide shortage of masks, so WHO urges people to use masks wisely.

WHO advises rational use of medical masks to avoid unnecessary wastage of precious resources and misuse of masks.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against Covid-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing. See basic protective measures against the new coronavirus for more information.

Source: WHO (<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<https://www.cdc.gov/>)

