



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Operational Guidelines on COVID-19 for Village Health Teams (VHTs)

Currently, there are over **1,350,000** positive COVID-19 cases globally, with over **74,000** deaths. As of **9th April**, Uganda had **53** confirmed cases with no deaths. Patients in countries with limited preparedness and response resources are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Sharp increases in COVID-19 caseloads may overwhelm health systems in countries already facing shortages of nurses, physicians and other health workers.

In some cases, health workforce availability is less than **10%** of what is estimated to be needed to deliver essential primary health care services. In addition disruptions in non-COVID essential health service delivery could cause many preventable deaths. Strategies to rapidly expand healthcare teams through community health workers has proven to be an effective response in previous epidemics. Developing innovative ways to deliver preventive and control services for COVID-19 are therefore urgently needed .

Uganda announced its first COVID-19 patient on **20th March** and since then the number is increasing and the role of Village Health Teams (VHTs) also referred to as Community Health Workers in other countries is paramount in fighting the pandemic and maintaining existing essential health service delivery in communities.

These guiding principles of VHTs are aligned with Uganda MoH and WHO priorities:

- To keep our VHTs and other frontline health workers safe through use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and adherence to the adjusted service delivery protocols
- To support COVID-19 prevention, detection and response initiatives (where appropriate)
- To continue providing essential health services (where possible) at community level.

Ministry of Health will sustain and maintain essential primary health service delivery where possible with updated protocols to ensure VHTs and patients remain safe, well supervised and at a reduced risk of contracting or transmitting covid-19. Where possible, MoH will implement “no touch” protocols for health service delivery where VHTs are trained in iCCM. All service delivery by VHTs should be conducted outside of home with at least 2 meters distance outside of homes.

While continuing support to provision of essential services, the following are the DOs and DON'Ts for the Village Health Team Members:

What a VHT can Do	What a VHT Cannot Do
<p>Prevent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educate and sensitize households and communities regarding signs, symptoms and transmission routes of COVID-19, as well as promote measures such as social distancing, self-isolation / quarantine, frequent hand washing, coughing/sneezing in flexed elbows, cloth and other WASH interventions. ● Educate and sensitize households and communities on malaria prevention such as sleeping under an ITN and other essential behaviors to stay healthy during the COVID pandemic. ● Sensitize communities through distribution of MOH approved IEC materials, SMS, phone calls and one on one interactions while observing social distance (2 meters apart). ● Support the placement of hand washing facilities in communities and health facilities and encourage the local residents to use them ● Support the health systems in preparing the communities for the eventual introduction of COVID-19 vaccines that are in development and other disease prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convene multiple people in a meeting-like setting to provide information about COVID-19 disease. ● Provide information which is not approved by MoH
<p>Detect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Under the supervision of facility based health workers, identify persons with COVID-19 signs and symptoms and report suspected cases by calling the toll-free lines: 919 / 0800-203-033 / 0800 303 033 / 0800 100 066 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Face to face interaction with suspected patients without using recommended Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and 2-metre distance. ● Diagnosing community members
<p>Respond:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor COVID-19 patients by phone for clinical deterioration. (Where phone coverage is not available, go outside patient home within a range of 2 meters distance) ● Support the rapid referral of individuals who require hospitalization ● Support patients under self-isolation to access food, social services and medical support. ● With personal protection as recommended by MoH, support contact tracing, symptom reporting, and phone monitoring of contacts of COVID-19 patients to ensure access to testing and treatment for those who develop signs and symptoms ● Support the disinfection of high risk surfaces in communities using appropriate infection prevention and control procedures (only where VHTs are equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Door to door follow up of community members with signs and symptoms of COVID-19 without using recommended PPE and 2-metre distance.