

Taxonomy and Glossary of Public Health and Social Measures that may be Implemented to Limit the Spread of COVID-19

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Background

While there is no vaccine against the virus that causes COVID-19, and few treatment options, public health and social measures (PHSMs) are currently the only opportunity to prevent or slow transmission of COVID-19. PHSMs include individual, environmental, surveillance and response and social physical distancing measures along with movement and travel restrictions.

Updated information about COVID-19 disease and other guidance documents can be found at <https://www.who.int/healthtopics/coronavirus>.

Purpose of this document

This document provides a classification scheme and a glossary of terms to define PHSMs that might be used to reduce transmission and slow the spread of COVID-19. These definitions will help improve clarity of terms and promote common understanding within WHO, other UN agencies, Member States and academic groups that are monitoring implementation of interventions and evaluating the potential impact of PHSMs on spread of COVID-19.

Depending on the measure or action defined, there may be additional descriptors to clarify the scope or intensity of the measure, level of enforcement, specific exemptions or targets of the measure.

Policies and adaptive strategies that may improve compliance with these measures (e.g., paid sick leave, teleworking, e-schooling) are not included in this taxonomy.

As new PHSMs are identified, the classification and glossary will be updated.

This document is not a WHO guideline and does not provide recommendations on the implementation of PHSMs. Inclusion of terms in this glossary does not necessarily imply WHO recommendation of this activity. Explanation of terms are meant to be indicative and descriptive. They may not be complete and are not meant to be formal definitions.

Updated guidance on responding to COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>.

Classification and glossary of public health and social measures for COVID-19¹

Public health and social measures (PHSM): Actions or measures taken by individuals, institutions, communities, local and national governments to reduce the spread of COVID-19. PHSM include non-pharmaceutical interventions, physical distancing measures, pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis and vaccines.

1. **Individual measures:** Actions or measures taken by individuals to reduce personal risk of infection or prevent spread of COVID-19.
 - 1.1. **Performing hand hygiene:** Washing hands with soap and water or cleaning hands by rubbing them with an alcohol-based formulation.
Scope: Personal, general public
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required
 - 1.2. **Limiting face touching:** Avoiding touching the eyes, nose and mouth.
 - 1.3. **Performing respiratory etiquette:** Covering mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing followed by disposing of any tissues into a closed trash receptacle and performing hand hygiene.
 - 1.4. **Wearing a mask:** Wearing a medical or cloth mask on the face, covering at least the nose and mouth.
Scope: Personal, caregivers, ill person or COVID-19 positive, healthcare workers, general public
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required.
 - 1.5. **Using other personal protective equipment:** Using goggles, visors or gloves.
 - 1.6. **Physical distancing:** Remaining at a distance of at least 1 metre from other individuals without touching.
Scope: Personal, general public
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required
2. **Environmental measures:** Actions taken to reduce the transmissibility or spread of COVID-19 through decontamination or modification of the environment.

¹ Definition of terms common to many PHSM include: cancellation - stopping an organized event or gathering from happening; closure – stopping operations; suspension –stopping a routine or recurrent action or event; restriction – limitation imposed on an activity, where the limitation may relate to the number of people, the frequency of the action or activity or ; adaptation measures – may include actions to detect suspect cases, ensure physical distancing, promote good hygiene and disinfect surfaces and objects; recommended – suggested action or activity; monitored – overseen with regular surveillance to determine compliance; required – officially compulsory.

- 2.1. **Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects:** Removal of dirt and impurities from surfaces and objects and using chemicals or ultraviolet light to kill virus particles.
Scope: Private areas, workplaces/businesses/institutions, public areas.
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required
- 2.2. **Improving air ventilation:** Natural or mechanical ventilation of air in rooms with the intent to provide a higher rate of air exchange and reduce the risk of airborne spread.
Scope: Private areas, workplaces/businesses/institutions, public areas.
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required
- 2.3. **Increasing room humidification:** Increasing the humidity of indoor air with the intent to reduce transmission of respiratory viruses.
Scope: Private areas, workplaces/businesses/institutions, public areas.
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required
3. **Surveillance and response measures:**² Detection of cases and isolation of confirmed or suspected cases, and identification, monitoring and quarantine of contacts of cases to limit spread of COVID-19.
- 3.1. **Detecting and isolating cases:** Detection of suspected cases, laboratory confirmation of infection and separation of ill or infected persons from others.
Scope: Testing strategy
- 3.1.1. **Passive case detection:** Detection of suspect COVID-19 cases triggered by patients seeking care for their illness.
Scope: Testing criteria
- 3.1.2. **Active case detection:** Detection of suspect COVID-19 cases by health workers or other persons who move out into the community to find persons with symptoms and refer them for testing. Health checkpoints are a type of active case detection.
Scope: Testing criteria
- 3.1.3. **Isolation:** Separation of ill or infected persons from others.
Scope: Home, facility-based
Level of enforcement: Recommended, monitored, required.
- 3.2. **Tracing and quarantining contacts:** Identification and follow-up of persons who are contacts of a confirmed or suspect case, and the restriction of activities or the separation of persons who are not ill but who have been exposed to a case.

² Refer to the WHO surveillance guidelines for the latest definitions used in COVID-19 surveillance.
[https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

3.2.1. **Contact tracing:** Interviews of cases to identify potential contacts.

Scope: Traditional, technology-enhanced³

3.2.2. **Quarantine:** Restriction of activities or the separation of persons who are not ill but who may have been exposed to a case to monitor their health for the development of illness.

Scope: Home, facility-based

Level of enforcement: Recommended, monitored, required

4. **Social and physical distancing measures:** Actions to reduce the risk of acquiring or spreading COVID-19 infections in various community settings by ensuring physical distancing.

4.1. School measures

4.1.1. **Adapting:** Actions taken to reduce spread of COVID-19 while keeping schools open.

Scope: Performing daily health checks, promoting hygiene and respiratory etiquette, physical distancing

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Target: Childcare centers, primary schools, secondary schools, post-secondary schools

4.1.2. **Closing:** Closure or partial closure of the school building to students, teachers and staff. In partial closures, teachers and staff may remain to provide meals to low-income students or to provide lessons to children of essential workers.

Scope: Full closure, partial closure

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Target: Childcare centers, primary schools, secondary schools, post-secondary schools

Timing: Reactive, proactive⁴

Exception: Immunity passport

4.2. Offices, businesses, institutions and operations

4.2.1. **Adapting:** Actions taken to reduce spread of COVID-19 while keeping offices, businesses, institutions and operations open.

Scope: Promoting hygiene and respiratory etiquette, modifying hours, limiting

³ Traditional contact tracing - interviews of probable or confirmed cases to identify all persons meeting the definition for a contact during the likely infectious period of the case; technology-enhanced contact tracing - use of digital information, such as cell phone locations, to identify persons who may have been in physical proximity to the case during the likely infectious period.

⁴ Reactive - after a case has been identified; proactive - before a case has been identified.

numbers of people, physical distancing
Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

- 4.2.2. **Closing:** Closure of offices, businesses, institutions and services (e.g., offices, restaurants, bars, sports clubs, hotels, fitness centres, gyms, places of worship, cultural centres, conference centers).

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Exception: Immunity passport

4.3. **Gatherings, businesses and services**

- 4.3.1. **Restricting private gatherings at home:** Restriction of the number of non-residents who can participate in private gatherings or events in the home.

Scope: Numerical restriction

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

- 4.3.2. **Cancelling, restricting or adapting private gatherings outside the home:**

Cancellation or restriction of the size or frequency of private gatherings or events outside the home (e.g., weddings, funerals, parties). If gatherings or events are allowed to continue, adaptation measures may be put in place to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Scope: Cancellation, numerical restriction, adaptation

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

- 4.3.3. **Cancelling, closing, restricting or adapting public gatherings outside the home:** Cancellation, closure or restriction of the size or frequency of public gatherings outside the home in public places. If gatherings or events are allowed to continue, adaptation measures may be put in place to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Scope: Cancellation, numerical restriction, adaptation

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

- 4.3.4. **Cancelling, restricting or adapting mass gatherings:** Cancellation or restriction of the size of planned or spontaneous events where the number of people attending could strain the planning and response resources of the community or country hosting the event (e.g., sports events, concerts, the Hajj, conferences). If mass gatherings or events are allowed to continue, adaptation measures may put in place to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Scope: Cancellation, numerical restriction, adaptation

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

4.4. **Special populations**

- 4.4.1. **Shielding vulnerable groups:** Measures to protect vulnerable persons at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19 (e.g., older individuals and those

with underlying conditions) or increased risk of infection (e.g., healthcare workers, homeless persons) including stay-at-home orders targeted to specific groups.

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Target: Specific high-risk groups, healthcare workers

- 4.4.2. **Protecting populations in closed settings:** Measures taken to reduce spread of COVID-19 in settings where populations reside in groups or are restrained or limited in movement or autonomy (e.g., some longer-term health care settings, seniors' residences, shelters, prisons). May include limiting visitors or outside excursions, cohorting of infected persons or green zones⁵.

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Target: Long-term care facility, prison, group homes, other

- 4.4.3. **Protecting displaced populations:** Measures taken to reduce spread in migrant, refugee or displaced persons settlements, including shielding strategies such as green zones.

Level of enforcement: Recommended, required

Target: Migrant camps, refugee settlements, internally displaced camps

4.5. Domestic travel

- 4.5.1. **Suspending or restricting movement:** Limitation of the free movement of the population within the country.

Scope: Suspension, restriction, containment zone (cordon sanitaire)⁶

Level of enforcement: Recommended or required

Target: Pedestrians, bicycles, private vehicles, taxis, public transport, trains, domestic air flights.

- 4.5.2. **Stay-at-home order:** All residents ordered to stay at home except for essential activities (e.g., food shopping, traveling to work at essential businesses, medical visits).

Scope: Curfew, all day

Level of enforcement: Recommended or required

- 4.5.3. **Restricting entry:** Denial or restriction of entry for travelers proceeding from other subnational areas (e.g., states or provinces).

Exceptions: Residents of the area, presentation of a certificate or card attesting a negative COVID-19 test

Level of enforcement: Recommended or required

⁵ Green zones - dedicated areas to house clinically vulnerable persons where stringent infection control and physical distancing measures are instituted.

⁶ Containment zone (cordon sanitaire) – a limited geographical area where all movement in and out of the area is strictly controlled.

4.5.4. **Closing internal land borders:** Partial or complete closure of ground crossings through land borders or other means of travel (e.g., suspension of flights or public transport) across subnational administrative areas (e.g., states or provinces).

5. **International travel measures:** Warnings or restrictions placed on the free movement of people between countries.

5.1. **Providing travel advice or warning:** Health advice or warnings provided by government authorities on country-level transmission of COVID-19 to guide individual decisions on travel.

5.2. **Restricting visas:** Suspension of visa on arrival or restriction of issuing visa for travelers originating from COVID-19 affected countries.

Target: Specific country, multiple countries, all countries

5.3. **Restricting entry:** Denial of entry for travelers proceeding from specific countries or any country without there being a general international flight ban or land border closure in place.

Target: Specific country, multiple countries, all countries

Exceptions: Residents, citizens, presentation of a certificate or card attesting a negative COVID-19 test.

5.4. **Restricting exit:** Denial of exit for travelers proceeding to specific countries.

5.5. **Entry screening and isolation or quarantine:** Evaluation of the health or exposure status of travelers entering the country where exposure may be defined as arriving from an affected country. Screening for symptoms or exposure may be followed by testing and isolation or quarantine.

5.6. **Exit screening and isolation or quarantine:** Evaluation of the health or exposure status of travelers leaving the country. Screening for symptoms or exposure to confirmed cases is usually followed by testing, if the person meets the national testing criteria, and isolation or quarantine.

5.7. **Suspending or restricting international flights:** Stopping arrival of international flights, restricting the origin or number of flights or rescheduling of flights.

Scope: Suspension, restriction, airport closure

5.8. **Suspending or restricting international ferries or ships:** Stopping arrival of ferries or ships, restricting the origin or number of ferries or ships or rescheduling of ferries or ships.

Scope: Suspension, restriction, seaport closure

5.9. **Closing international land borders:** Partial or complete closure of ground crossings through land borders.

Scope: Partial, complete

6. **Drug-based measures**

6.1. **Using medications for prevention:** Use of medications to prevent infection with the COVID-19 virus.

Scope: Research, policy

Target: Healthcare workers, essential employees, clinically vulnerable populations

Timing: Pre- or post-exposure

6.2. **Using medications for treatment:** Use of medication to reduce infectiousness or shorten infectious period.

Scope: Research, policy

7. **Biological measures**

7.1. **Using antibodies for prevention:** Use of COVID-19 antibodies to prevent infection.

Scope: Research, policy

Timing: Pre- or post-exposure

7.2. **Using vaccines for prevention:** Use of a product that stimulates the development of immunity and protects the body from disease due to COVID-19.

Scope: Research, policy

Proposed classification of public health and social measures

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
Individual		Performing hand hygiene	Personal General public	Recommended Required		
		Limiting face touching				
		Performing respiratory etiquette				
		Wearing a mask	Personal Caregivers Ill person/COVID-19 positive Healthcare workers General public	Recommended Required		
		Using other PPE				
		Physical distancing	Personal General public	Recommended Required		
Environmental		Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and object	Private areas Workplaces/ businesses/ institutions Public areas	Recommended Required		
		Improving air ventilation	Private areas Workplaces/ businesses/ institutions Public areas	Recommended Required		

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
		Increasing room humidification	Private areas Workplaces/ businesses/ institutions Public areas	Recommended Required		
Surveillance and response	Detecting and isolating cases	Passive case detection	Determined by testing criteria			
		Active case detection	Determined by testing criteria			
		Isolation	Home isolation Facility-based isolation	Recommended Monitored Required		
	Tracing and quarantining contacts	Contact tracing	Traditional Technology-enhanced			
		Quarantine	Home quarantine Facility-based quarantine	Recommended Monitored Required		
Social physical distancing	Schools	Adapting	Health checks Promoting hygiene Physical distancing	Recommended Required	Childcare centers Primary schools Secondary schools	
		Closing	Partial closure Full closure	Recommended Required	Post-secondary schools	Reactive Proactive
	Offices, businesses, institutions and operations	Adapting	Hygiene Modifying hours Limiting numbers	Recommended Required	Non-commercial workplaces Shopping centres	

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
			Physical distancing		Restaurants/bars Sports clubs/fitness centres/gyms Cultural institutions Places of worship Entertainment venues Other	
		Closing	Partial closure Full closure	Recommended Required		
	Gatherings	Private gatherings at home	Numerical restriction	Recommended Required		
		Private gatherings outside the home	Cancellation Restriction Adaptation	Recommended Required		
		Public gatherings outside the home	Cancellation/ closure Restriction Adaptation	Recommended Required		
		Mass gatherings	Cancellation Restriction Adaptation	Recommended Required	Specify	
	Special populations	Shielding vulnerable groups		Recommended Required	Specific high-risk groups Healthcare workers	
		Protecting populations in closed settings		Recommended Required	Long-term care facilities Prisons	

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
					Facilities for disabled persons Other	
		Protecting displaced populations		Recommended Required	Migrant camps Refugee settlements Internally displaced camps	
	Domestic travel	Restricting movement	Suspension Restriction	Recommended Required	Pedestrians Bicycles Private vehicles Taxis Public transport Trains Domestic air flights	
					Location	
		Stay at home order	Curfew All day	Recommended Required		
		Restricting entry into subnational areas		Recommended Required		
		Closing internal land borders				
International travel		Providing travel advice or warning				

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
		Restricting visas			Specific country Multiple countries All countries	
		Restricting entry			Specific country Multiple countries All countries	
		Restricting exit				
		Entry screening and isolation or quarantine				
		Exit screening and isolation or quarantine				
		International flights	Suspension Restriction Airport closure			
		International ferries or ships	Suspension Restriction Seaport closure			
		International land borders	Partial closure Complete closure			
Drug-based		Medications for prevention			Healthcare workers Essential employees Clinically vulnerable	Pre-exposure Post-exposure

Class of measure	Sub-class	Action	Scope of measure	Level of enforcement	Target	Timing
		Medications for treatment				
Biological		Antibodies for prevention				Pre-exposure
		Vaccine				Post-exposure