



Kenya Medical Association

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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KMA WEEKLY STATEMENT ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Kenya Medical Association is a membership organization representing medical and dental practitioners registered to practice in Kenya with a twin mission of championing the welfare of doctors and advocating for the provision of quality healthcare for all.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads across the world, and numbers continue to rise in Kenya, the Kenya Medical Association continues to support government efforts to stop the spread and manage those that are infected. The KMA President, Dr Jacqueline Kitulu, and the Secretary-General, Dr Simon Kigundu, are providing invaluable support as members of the Ministry of Health Taskforce that is implementing the government's emergency response. The Treasurer-General, Dr Supa Tunje, and the CEO, Dr Elizabeth Gitau are providing logistical support for all activities during this pandemic.

Further, the Kenya Medical Association National Executive Council has today formed a COVID-19 Response Advisory Committee to provide professional leadership and direction during this crisis. The Committee will, among other things, review and generate the evidence and guidance necessary for health workers to fight this pandemic to the best of their abilities. The Committee is chaired by the Vice-President, Prof Lukoye Atwoli, and has the Assistant Secretary-General, Dr Joy Mugambi as Vice-chair. The membership of the committee includes members of KMA who are distinguished scholars and clinicians, and it commences its work immediately.

In line with our commitment to provide regular briefs on the effort to manage this pandemic, we would like to make the following observations:

1. On Personal Protective Equipment:

- a. The shortage of personal protective equipment continues to put the lives of the frontline health workers at risk. While KMA is gratified that local manufacturers have joined the effort to manufacture and supply these indispensable items, we believe that more can be done in this regard.
- b. KMA therefore advises members to familiarize themselves with the proper and rational use of PPEs, and to ensure that they are always properly protected when handling patients suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.
- c. Further, we continue to make available the online training modules on COVID-19 management, and we urge all members to register and get the training.

2. On the use of medical or surgical masks by members of the public

- a. KMA is aware of the ongoing debate on the role of masks in prevention of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. While there is some evidence that widespread mask use may reduce the risk of illness by blocking direct aerosol or droplet inhalation, little work has been done to confirm the relative contribution of these modes of COVID-19 transmission as compared with other

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modes such as through touching of contaminated surfaces. Others have suggested that improper mask use can increase the risk of infection through contamination of masks or increased face-touching while wearing the mask.

- b. While some experts and societies have recommended widespread mask use as a prevention tool, the Kenya Medical Association currently endorses the WHO advice that masks should be worn only by health workers in the clinical areas, persons with respiratory illness, and by caregivers of persons with COVID-19.
- c. We observe that this guidance takes into consideration other factors other than the equivocal evidence of risk reduction, including the socio-economic impact of recommending mandatory mask use in a population in which the vast majority of the people live below the poverty line and are already burdened by inadequate sanitation.
- d. We discourage guidelines that appear to segregate the population, and only apply to a segment that is well-to-do, and that further increase the risk of inappropriate use of PPEs and their resultant scarcity when needed by health providers.
- e. The Association shall continue reviewing the evidence on widespread mask use, and will make appropriate recommendations should the evidence shift in one direction or the other.

3. On psychological support for health workers

- a. The Association notes the heavy toll this pandemic is already having on the health workforce, and the stress our members are being exposed to as they prepare and respond with limited resources.
- b. Our Physicians Health Committee is on standby to refer affected members to care, and at the hospital level we recommend that mental health and psychological support teams be available to support frontline workers as they deal with COVID-19.

4. On coordination of the response

- a. While the Association appreciates the government coordination mechanism led by President Uhuru Kenyatta himself, we regret to note that professional advice from health experts is not always being treated with the seriousness it deserves, delaying important interventions and increasing the risk to Kenyans.
- b. We urge the government to let the infectious disease experts, epidemiologists, and other health experts to lead the teams deciding what interventions should be prioritized.
- c. The Kenya Medical Association's COVID-19 Response Advisory Committee stands ready to provide this leadership when called upon to do so.

5. Conclusion

- a. The Association encourages all members of the public to continue observing the guidelines issued by the WHO and the Ministry of Health concerning physical distancing, washing hands with soap and water, avoiding open coughing or sneezing, contacting the COVID-19 hotline if you have symptoms, and staying at home as much as is possible
- b. We reiterate that it is possible to stop the spread of COVID-19 if we all observe these measures, but we urge everyone to prepare for an overwhelmed health system should the numbers continue to rise.

Signed,



**Dr. Jacqueline Kitulu,
President.**