The following information contains an overview of the new Coronavirus as well as more detailed information about how it relates to people affected by leprosy.

**What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. The disease causes respiratory illness (like the flu) with symptoms, such as cough, fever and in most severe cases, difficulty in breathing.

**How does COVID-19 spread?**

The Coronavirus spreads in droplets that are sent into the air when someone with the virus coughs or sneezes. If you are nearby, you could breathe these droplets with the virus. The droplets can also land on surfaces where they may be picked up by your hands. If you then touch your face with contaminated hands, you could become infected with COVID-19.

**I am taking medicines (MDT) for leprosy. Am I more at risk of COVID-19?**

Having leprosy does not make you fall ill with COVID-19. However, leprosy patients with diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and patients on steroids and other immunosuppresants are at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection.

**COVID-19 Know The Facts**

**COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person**

- Droplets released when someone sick sneezes or coughs can land on the mouths or noses of people nearby
- Close contact with someone sick – like hugging or shaking hands

**COVID-19 mainly spreads from person to person**

But it can also be left on objects and surfaces...

So if you touch something contaminated and then touch your face or another’s face, you might all fall ill.

**Reduce your risk of COVID-19**

- Clean your hands often
- Cough or sneeze in your bent elbow – not your hands!
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Limit social gatherings and time spent in crowded places
- Avoid close contact with someone who is sick
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

**I have been cured of leprosy. Am I more at risk of COVID-19?**

If you have been cured of leprosy and do not have serious underlying medical conditions, you may not be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. The risk of developing COVID-19 is equal to that of general population.
How can I protect myself?

There are lots of simple but effective measures that you can take to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds every two hours with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitisers, especially when you get home or into work.
- When you sneeze or cough, do it into your bent elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- If you have a cough, always carry tissue paper with you and use it while you cough or sneeze. Then throw the tissue paper in a closed container, and wash your hands, or use an alcohol-based sanitiser gel.
- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance from others.
- If you are being treated with MDT for leprosy, it is as important as ever to take all your medications as prescribed.

How can I take care of my wheelchair or crutches, if I am using one?

If you are a wheelchair user, sanitise/wash your wheelchair daily, especially clean the wheelchair handles, seats, rims and wheels. Canes and crutches must also be sanitised, especially after walking around.

If I develop symptoms of COVID-19 whilst on treatment for leprosy, how should I manage this?

If you fall ill with symptoms of COVID-19, make sure you inform your doctor or health worker on phone. Stay in regular contact with them and let them know about any symptoms you may have or changes to your condition. Do not self-medicate.

Should I get tested for COVID-19 as I am taking MDT?

You are not required to get tested for COVID-19 if you do not have symptoms (cough, fever, or difficulty in breathing). If you have any of these symptoms, contact your doctor, he will decide whether you need the tests and will connect you to the laboratory designated for tests. Or else, call the State Helpline Number or Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India’s 24x7 helpline 011-2397 8046. If you qualify as a case for testing as per the protocol, you will be tested at a government-approved lab or a designated private lab.
I am already stigmatised because of leprosy. Will I be stigmatised more because of COVID-19? How can I manage this?

Know the facts about COVID-19 from a trusted source (this Q&A document gives correct facts about COVID-19). Educate others around you to dispel myths about the disease. Understand that anyone can fall sick regardless of their age, gender or religion. Someone who has completed quarantine does not pose a risk of infecting people. For many COVID-19 patients, being labelled, stereotyped and separated has become daily routine, primarily because there is no vaccine or cure yet. Help avoid discrimination and stigma around Coronavirus by raising your voices against stigma and discrimination.

I am feeling very anxious about leprosy and COVID-19. How can I manage this?

Many people are feeling anxious about COVID-19. It is understandable that you may be very concerned if you are also affected by leprosy. To ensure that you do not run out of your supply of MDT tablets, you may keep 2-3 months of MDT, and if you are on steroids, continue taking the tablets as per the advice of your physician. In case you develop any leprosy-related complication (such as reaction and neuritis), please visit the nearest PHC or call the treating hospital.

Taking practical steps to protect your health, such as following good hygiene measures and getting proper rest and nutrition will reduce your risk of illness and also put your mind at ease. Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep.

As you stay at home in isolation, connect with your friends and family members through WhatsApp and other means. But avoid watching disturbing news on television or social media. Staying updated with information is great. If you feel hopeless, reach out to your doctor or healthcare worker. We all are in this together.
We Have Started a Tele-Counselling Service - Get Your Doubts Cleared

If you need any information or want your doubts cleared about COVID-19 and leprosy, our counsellors/volunteers will help you. You can speak to them from Monday to Saturday as per the details given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the counsellor/volunteer</th>
<th>Mobile number</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Sinphia Ajith</td>
<td>+91-9999739802</td>
<td>8 a.m. to 8 p.m.</td>
<td>English, Hindi, Malayalam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Pankaj Gupta</td>
<td>+91-9810662896</td>
<td>9 a.m. to 12 p.m.</td>
<td>English and Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Manoj Arya</td>
<td>+91-7838181721</td>
<td>12 p.m. to 3 p.m.</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Selvarajan</td>
<td>+91-8750173877</td>
<td>7 a.m. to 10 a.m.</td>
<td>Hindi and Tamil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; The World Health Organization; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)