

During stressful times, such as this pandemic, we know that fear and anxiety can lead to stigma towards certain populations or nationalities. Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger toward other people. Stigma can also deter individuals from accessing needed health care and taking measures to prevent others from getting sick. The language we use to communicate about COVID-19 is one way to prevent stigma and help slow and treat the spread of this virus.

Stigma Defined

- Stigma is when there is a set of negative and often untrue beliefs about certain people, places, or things. Stigma often comes in the form of labeling or stereotyping a particular group or discriminating against them in some way. This can occur in health care over a condition such as COVID-19.
- Some groups of people who may be experiencing stigma because of COVID-19 include:
 - Persons of Asian descent
 - People who have traveled
 - Emergency responders or healthcare professionals
 - Persons experiencing homelessness
 - Persons with a substance use disorder

Stigma and COVID-19

- The high level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on three main factors:
 - It is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns.
 - We are often afraid of the unknown.
 - It is easy to associate that fear with 'others'.
- Stigma may cause individuals to hide signs of illness or delay seeking care for fear of judgment or discrimination

Destigmatizing Language and COVID-19

- Our words matter! Stigma is created and reinforced by language choices.
- No matter what role you play in our health system, the language and labels that you choose to use can reduce stigma and discrimination. Consider these approaches:
 - Use official terms. Talk about the novel coronavirus and COVID-19 (the official disease name). Do not attach locations or ethnicities to the disease to avoid stigmatization.
 - Use "people first language." Talk about "people who have COVID-19," or "people who are recovering from COVID-19," etc. Refrain from referring to people with COVID-19 as "cases or victims" in public communication.
 - Talk about people "acquiring" or "contracting" COVID-19. Terms like people "transmitting the virus," "infecting others," or "spreading the virus" inadvertently may imply intention and assign blame.

Adapted from the [CDC](#) and [WHO](#) recommendations on reducing stigma around COVID-19.

Created by the [Penn Medicine Center for Health Equity Advancement](#)