



Washington D.C.  
8455 Colesville Road  
Suite 1100  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
phone: 240-235-2000

January 30, 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General  
World Health Organization  
Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva  
SWITZERLAND

Dear Dr. Tedros:

The novel coronavirus, 2019-nCoV, which has spread rapidly since it was first identified a few weeks ago, poses a threat to public health around the world. Healthcare facilities at the epicenter of the outbreak are already overwhelmed. As more and more suspected cases are identified every day, the potential for a surge in patients seeking care in communities around the world is very real. Without sufficient preparation this could overwhelm more healthcare facilities, putting patients, their families, and nurses and other healthcare staff at even greater risk.

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides important resources that can guide healthcare employers' preparedness to respond to potential cases of 2019-nCoV. However, WHO's interim guidance on "Infection prevention and control during health care when novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection is suspected" ("interim guidance on infection prevention and control") falls short in ways that endanger the health and safety of the nurses and other healthcare workers that patients and their families rely on for life-saving care.<sup>1</sup> WHO should strengthen its interim guidance on infection prevention and control in the following ways:

- 1. WHO should call for airborne precautions to be implemented when healthcare workers are caring for patients with possible or known 2019-nCoV infections.**

In the current situation where little is known about the transmission of 2019-nCoV, the WHO's recommendation that only droplet and contact precautions be used for patients with possible 2019-nCoV infections is irresponsible and may endanger healthcare workers. The WHO interim guidance neglects the precautionary principle, which states that we should not wait until we know for certain that something is harmful before we take action to protect

---

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. "Infection prevention and control during health care when novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection is suspected." Available at [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/infection-prevention-and-control-during-health-care-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/infection-prevention-and-control-during-health-care-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected) (Accessed Jan 24, 2020).

people's health. This is a new virus whose transmission pathway is unknown. Furthermore, at least fourteen healthcare workers have been infected with 2019-nCoV in China. Under the precautionary principle and as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WHO should call for airborne precautions to be implemented, in addition to contact and droplet precautions, for all patients with possible or known 2019-nCoV infections.<sup>2</sup>

**2. WHO should explicitly call on healthcare employers to communicate clearly and transparently with nurses and other healthcare staff about 2019-nCoV cases and potential occupational exposure.**

Workers have a fundamental right to a safe and healthy workplace. It is unacceptable for an employer to hide information from employees about their possible or known exposure to any hazard including 2019-nCoV.

We, the undersigned affiliated unions of Global Nurses United, which unites nurses' unions in 28 countries around the world, call upon you to strengthen WHO's interim guidance on infection prevention and control to protect the nurses and other healthcare workers who are at the heart of patient care and essential to the response to 2019-nCoV.

If you have questions regarding this letter or would like to arrange a meeting, please contact Kenneth Zinn, coordinator of Global Nurses United, at +1-240-235-2008 or at [kzinn@nationalnursesunited.org](mailto:kzinn@nationalnursesunited.org). We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Annie Butler, Federal Secretary  
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation  
Australia

Shirley Marshal Díaz Morales, Presidenta  
Federação Nacional dos Enfermeiros  
Brazil

---

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Interim Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients Under Investigation for 2019 Novel Coronavirus." Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/infection-control.html> (Accessed Jan 24, 2020).

Linda Silas, President  
Canadian Federation of Nurses Union  
Canada

Nancy Bédard, Présidente  
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec  
Canada

Rodrigo Ml. López García, Secretario General  
Asociación Nacional de Profesionales en Enfermería  
Costa Rica

Johnsel Diaoen, President  
CBV  
Curaçao

Julio César García Cruceta, Secretario General  
Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Enfermería (SINATRAE)  
Dominican Republic

George Tsolas, President  
Thomai Aslanoglou, General Secretary  
Pan-Hellenic Federation of Nursing Staff (PASONOP)  
Greece

Luis Alpirez, Secretario General  
Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Salud de Guatemala (SNTSG-FNL)  
Guatemala

Abogado Josue Jeremías Orellana Muñoz, Presidente  
Asociación Nacional de Enfermeras (os) Auxiliares de Honduras (ANEEAH)  
Honduras

Rince Joseph, National Working President  
United Nurses Association  
India

Dr. Edward Mathews, Director of Professional and Regulatory Services  
Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation  
Ireland

Seth Panyako, General Secretary  
Kenya National Union of Nurses  
Kenya

Mirna Gallardo, Presidenta  
Asociación Paraguaya de Enfermería  
Paraguay

Maristela P. Abenojar, National President  
Filipino Nurses United  
The Philippines

Guadalupe Simões, Coordinator, International Relations Department  
Sindicato dos Enfermeiros Portugueses  
Portugal

Andre Gitembagara, President  
Rwanda Nurses and Midwives Union  
Rwanda

Na, Soon Ja, President  
Korean Health and Medical Workers Union  
South Korea

Manuel Cascos Fernández, President  
Sindicato de Enfermería (SATSE)  
Spain

Zxyyann Lu, Board Member  
Taiwan Nurses Union  
Taiwan

Justus Cherop Kiplangat, President  
Uganda Nurses and Midwives Union  
Uganda

Bonnie Castillo, RN, Executive Director  
Deborah Burger, RN, President  
Zenei Cortez, RN, President  
Jean Ross, RN, President  
National Nurses United  
United States of America

Dra. Silvia Santana, Presidenta  
Sindicato Único de Enfermería del Uruguay  
Uruguay

cc: Ms. Elizabeth Iro, Chief Nursing Officer, WHO