



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

4 November 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I hope that you and your families are well and in good health.

As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic response, I would like to assure you once again that the health and safety of personnel and delegates continues to be our number one priority.

Numerous measures have been taken to protect personnel and delegates in the workplace environment. These measures are comprehensive and strong and are regularly monitored. However, efforts to prevent the spread of the virus and to mitigate the risks within the premises of the United Nations will require the cooperation of everyone.

In light of the COVID-19 cases reported last week at United Nations Headquarters in New York, I would like to outline the standard operating procedures that we followed and will continue to follow should we have positive cases among delegates or personnel who have been on the premises.

In circumstances where we receive information that United Nations personnel or delegates have tested positive for COVID-19 and might have accessed the United Nations premises on the day or days leading up to the diagnosis, the United Nations Medical Services will immediately initiate contact tracing to arrange testing and provide necessary support. All personnel and delegates who may have found themselves in the vicinity of the infected individual(s) on the United Nations premises will be provided with medical advice and a viral PCR test under the United Nations Headquarters testing programme. If required, a recommendation will be made for in-person meetings to be suspended until such time as the extent of the exposure becomes clear.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have recorded 5,660 lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases among the United Nations system civilian and military personnel and their dependants across all duty stations and locations. A number of medical and other support measures have been put in place to protect our personnel in the field as they continue our critical operations. To date, we have registered 132 lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases among United Nations personnel and their dependants in New York. None of the personnel had been in the building during the exposure period and therefore could not have infected other individuals at the workplace. We therefore have no reported cases of workplace transmission in New York.

All United Nations Staff Members in New York

As part of our reintegration plan, the United Nations Headquarters complex in New York has a range of cleaning protocols in place to ensure strict hygiene standards. These measures include the regular cleaning of all areas of the building, the cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces on a daily basis, the availability of hand sanitizers on every floor and in common areas, as well as the cleaning and sanitizing of conference rooms and interpretation booths, including earphones and other equipment before and after usage. The ventilation system has been reconfigured to include the maximum amount of fresh air intake possible, and to increase air turnover. This includes extended periods of “flushing” the HVAC system twice a day and the installation of additional filtering capability. Major entry/exit doors and hallway doors will be kept open, subject to fire and security restrictions. Where possible, larger areas and corridors have been marked for traffic flow.

We will continue to assess all in-person meeting requests and be guided by medical advice to minimize the potential risk to all participants. It is our individual and collective responsibility to respect and abide by the risk mitigation procedures. For meetings taking place on site, and in order to minimize risks associated with indoor gatherings, all personnel and delegates are expected to wear face coverings at all times when in public spaces and common areas, as well as to maintain physical distancing in order to keep themselves and others as safe as possible.

Additionally, by swiping their valid United Nations identification cards upon entering the United Nations Headquarters premises, personnel and delegates will be confirming that they meet the following requirements:

- no COVID-19 symptoms in the past 14 days;
- no positive COVID-19 test in the past 14 days; and
- no close contact with a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case in the past 14 days.

As we enter the flu season, it is even more important to stay vigilant and to protect ourselves, our communities, and each other. Influenza and COVID-19 have similar symptoms, such as fever, chills, cough, fatigue, and muscle aches. Both pose a risk to our health. Any individuals who have symptoms, feel unwell or have been in contact with individuals who have shown symptoms, are advised to stay at home and not come to the United Nations premises until a primary care physician has confirmed that it is safe to do so.

Any individuals who start feeling unwell with flu or COVID-19-like symptoms while at the United Nations premises, are advised to immediately return to their residence, self-isolate in accordance with local requirements, and seek medical care from a primary health-care provider. Personnel and delegates are encouraged to contact the United Nations COVID-19 helpline (212 963 9999) for assistance.

Testing for COVID-19 can be arranged by contacting the United Nations Headquarters Clinic (212 963 7090 or unhqclinic@un.org) or the Division of Health-care Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOSH) at osh@un.org. All such approaches will be handled with full confidentiality and privacy. DHMOSH has access to its own mobile COVID-19 testing capacity, enabling samples to be taken in the home, usually with results within 48-72 hours. This service is also available to delegates and personnel, as well as to their household members. Additionally, testing locations are available to the general public.

Thank you for your continued support and flexibility during these challenging times as we work together to keep each other safe and well.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

António Guterres