

CORONAVIRUS SAFETY AND REPORTING GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS



Don't shake hands



Wash Your Hands



Cover Coughs



Clean And Disinfect

#Covid 19

#Stay Safe, #No story worth your life

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The people need more accurate, reliable information now more than ever. As the world fights the coronavirus pandemic, they would rely on journalists to provide them with such unsullied life-saving informative and educative stories.

The Gambia Press Union (GPU) note that while journalists have an obligation to keep people informed and educated in these extraordinary times, it is very important for them to equally observe all safety measures in order to stay alive to tell the story. Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures.

Newsrooms all over the world are adopting strict policies that have seen major adjustments on news gathering and reporting, including work from home policies and the use of online tools like skype to report news.

Journalists and media workers in The Gambia are advised to consider the following safety and reporting tips on the coronavirus outbreak:

Avoid Getting Infected



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- Wash your hands with soap before and after every interview and frequently use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol).
- Avoid close contact with people coughing, sneezing and blowing their noses. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue paper when you cough or sneeze, and discard safely in a dust bin.
- Do not board congested public transport (van or gele-gele) to and from an interview or work. Newsrooms should provide an office car or a hired taxi.
- Remember to maintain a safe distance if you must have a face-to-face interview. And don't shake

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hands.

- If you are using microphones, use directional mic from a safe distance. If using a recorder, still maintain a safe distance and disinfect your recorder and mic sponge after every use.

- Consider covering your microphone or voice recorder with a plastic which should be safely disposed of after every use.
- Use protective gear if working in and around a hospital or a quarantine facility.
- If you develop coronavirus-like symptoms, call the toll-free number 1025 to notify emergency health services. Do inform your editors and colleagues as well.
- Newsrooms should consider introducing work-from-home policies. If there is a need for staff to work from the office, only a few, essential staff should be allowed – to enforce social distancing.
- Newsrooms should endeavour to provide health insurance policies for reporters sent on assignments in high-risk places like quarantine facilities, or to places known to have recorded high number of cases.

Care For Face Masks

- Newsrooms should provide face masks for use when necessary.
- If you wear masks, please dispose them after use. If they are cloth or reusable masks, please wash after use.

Online Safety

- Be aware of phishing emails. Do not open suspicious emails and do not download attachments from such emails.
- Do not just click on any COVID-19 related links; some might take you to sites that infect devices with malware. Avoid clicking on social media links to strange websites.
- You might face online trolling, bullying or even threats relating to your coverage of COVID-19. Discuss with your editors on how to handle such when they arise.



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In The Field

- Avoid press conferences and other events. Ask to be sent press statements or request phone interviews or emailed responses to questions. Take into account that government has banned public gatherings.
- If you must be at a press conference physically, do observe all requisite prevention measures to and from the press conference, and during the press conference.
- Discuss with your editor what plans they have if you fall ill on assignment. Avoid using public transport, arrange to travel in office car or hire a taxi.

- When visiting Gambian borders, do a risk assessment by checking what possible harm you might face including risks of contracting the coronavirus, car accidents, and possible hostile persons.
- Take along all the supplies you will need including a travel size hand sanitizer, liquid soap, a bottle of water and tissue papers.
- Avoid street foods. Take along a soft drink(s) and high energy packaged foods like chocolate bars/digestive biscuits. Always wash hands before eating.
- Your family might be concerned about your work during this time, consider setting up a conversation between your concerned family member and your editor.
- Assignment editors should avoid sending reporters to a quarantine facility/zone without protective gears. Freelance journalists too should take note of this.
- Disinfect gadgets like microphones, recorders, cameras etc. Disinfectant sprays maybe available in pharmacies and supermarkets.

Writing Stories

- Be aware of misinformation (or what others refer to as Fake News). Fact-check, fact-check and fact-check.

- Avoid reporting on **rumours** and **suspected cases** – they add to spreading fear and anxiety.
- Journalists should only report on **rumours** to achieve one of two objectives:
 1. To **prove** that it is **true**.
 2. To **dismiss** it as a **lie**.
- If you cannot confirm a rumour as true or dismiss it as a lie – do not report on it.
- Do report on all confirmed cases.
- Avoid sensationalising stories.
- Find out about coronavirus terms and correct usage. Check the Associated Press Stylebook on coronavirus Terms – available online.
- For official information on the coronavirus, use data from the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. Cite official information only on verified social media accounts of the Ministry of Health and the WHO.
- Use health experts to analyse figures and patterns and explain these in the context and language that people will understand.
- Avoid identifying patients or suspects in photos, by name and addresses and those of their relatives or colleagues. If the patient(s) announced their status, or are involved in awareness advocacy on the coronavirus, you can quote them.
- While reporting on new cases, do not forget to keep the public reminded on how to avoid contracting the virus – use advice from the Ministry of Health, the WHO and recognised health experts and institutions like the Medical Research Council Unit The Gambia.
- Maintain media's watchdog role. Find out and report on what is happening to people who contracted the virus and those in quarantine? How are their cases (suspected and confirmed) being managed? What sort of medication are they receiving? Where are they being held and under what conditions? How many isolation centres there are? What are the conditions in these centres? How many beds are available? How are COVID-19 funds being handled and distributed? Look for lapses and inadequacies in government preparedness, and also reckless behaviour that exposes people to possible infections.



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except their citizens.

- Arrive early at the airport for any required health checks and keep up to date with changes made to your destination.

Useful Contacts: Covid-19 Response

- Sana Sambou, Incident Manager, Public Health Emergency and Operations Center, Epidemiology and Disease Control Unit
- Tel: 3516320 / 2422949
- Email: covid19gambia@gmail.com / sanasambou@hotmail.com

Useful Contacts and Verified Accounts: Ministry of Health

- Dr. Ahmadou Lamin Samateh, Minister of Health, Tel: +220 3113558
- Modou Njai, Director of Health Promotion, Tel: +220 2002851 / +220 3509011
- Pa Modou Faal, media officer, MoH Tel: +220 312 0093
- Twitter: [@MohGambia](https://twitter.com/MohGambia)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Ministry-of-Health-The-Gambia-100866698020695/>
- Email: mohofficialinfo@gmail.com
- Website: <http://www.moh.gov.gm/> - not regularly updated

Travel Plans

- Avoid travelling to affected countries or regions. If you must travel, adhere to the Ministry of Health and WHO instructions on prevention. Check on existing travel bans and purchase refundable tickets.
- Have a contingency plan in place. Do not travel if you feel ill.
- Check on the visa situation for your destination. Call up the embassy or consulate to enquire about the issuing of visas. Some countries are not allowing visitors

Useful Contacts and Verified Accounts: MRC Unit The Gambia

- Tel: 4495442 / 4495446
- Twitter: [@mrcunitgambia](#)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mrcunitgambia/>
- Email: information@mrc.gm
- Website: <http://mrc.gm/> - regularly updated

These safety tips and reporting guidelines are adapted from the following:

- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)
- Thomas R. Lansner of Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs in Ethiopia
- Media Academy for Journalism and Communication (MAJaC)
- First Draft
- The News Manual

Additional Resources

- What Investigative Reporters Around the World Need to Be Asking About COVID-19: https://gijn.org/2020/03/10/what-investigative-reporters-around-the-world-need-to-be-asking-about-covid-19/?mc_cid=df4743b444&mc_eid=b5b6a28b13
- Tips for Journalists Covering COVID-19: https://gijn.org/2020/03/10/tips-for-journalists-covering-covid-19/?mc_cid=df4743b444&mc_eid=b5b6a28b13
- Tips for reporting on Covid-19 and slowing the spread of misinformation: https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/tips-for-reporting-on-covid-19-coronavirus-and-slowing-the-spread-of-misinformation/?mc_cid=df4743b444&mc_eid=b5b6a28b13
- How journalists can fight stress from covering the coronavirus: <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/how-journalists-can-fight-stress-from-covering-the-coronavirus/>
- How newsrooms can tone down their coronavirus coverage while still reporting responsibly: <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/how-newsrooms-can-tone-down-their-coronavirus-coverage-while-still-reporting-responsibly/>

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