

## **Considerations for distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) amid COVID-19 concerns and in COVID-19 affected countries**

NOTE: The WHO policies and technical guidance around COVID-19 must be followed (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>).

These key messages relate to considerations that National Malaria Control/Elimination Programmes (NMCP/NMEP) and partners involved in distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) may need to take into account in the coming weeks and months as the COVID-19 pandemic affects more countries. NMCP/NMEP must, however, ensure that national regulations and policies concerned with the reduction of COVID-19 are strictly followed, while bearing in mind that these may affect planned ITN distributions for 2020 and 2021.

For ITN distribution, particularly campaigns, it is not necessary for countries to immediately change strategies for the targeted area. Timing for modified strategies and where adapted approaches need to be applied should be based on the epidemiological context of the country, the number of ITNs available for distribution and the national regulations and policies around reduction of COVID-19 transmission. This document will be updated as more information becomes available.

All considerations must be within the context of the existing WHO COVID-19 guidance around minimizing transmission. Preventive and mitigation measures are key. The most effective preventive measures in the community include:

- Performing hand hygiene frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty or with soap and water if hands are dirty
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Practising respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately disposing of the tissue
- Wearing a medical mask if you have respiratory symptoms and performing hand hygiene after disposing of the mask<sup>1</sup>
- Maintaining social distance (a minimum of one metre) from persons with respiratory symptoms.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>.

## Key messages from the Alliance for Malaria Prevention (AMP)<sup>2</sup>

### National malaria programmes and partners should:

1. Map out how COVID-19 response strategies, including regulations to reduce transmission, will affect ongoing malaria prevention efforts and how to balance efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 with those to prevent malaria morbidity and mortality.
2. Ensure the safety of people involved in ITN campaign distribution in the context of COVID-19. A precautionary approach in line with WHO<sup>3,4</sup> technical guidance should be applied everywhere immediately, even if no cases have been detected.
3. Work with all government stakeholders and technical partners, as well as in coordination with the national COVID-19 emergency task force, to take decisions and agree on the best and safest way to distribute ITNs.
4. Consider all options for ITN distribution – campaign, routine, community-based, etc.
5. Prioritize areas for ITN distribution based on malaria burden (incidence and mortality) and intervention stratification if the originally targeted geographic regions and populations are not able to be fully covered as planned. Focus on reaching those at highest risk<sup>5</sup> while plans are put in place to distribute ITNs in other areas later<sup>6</sup>.
6. Continue routine and continuous distribution of ITNs where these are in place. Where a mass campaign is not possible or may be delayed in areas due to COVID-19 transmission and national guidelines in place to mitigate the spread of the disease, community channels<sup>7</sup> should be expanded or explored to ensure that nets are available in households for malaria prevention.
7. Place orders for the personal protection equipment needed<sup>8</sup> (e.g. commodities for health checks in accordance with country guidelines, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, water, soap and other items based on national or WHO guidelines) from the appropriate suppliers at the same time as ITNs are procured or before, based on delivery timeline estimates.
8. Review plans for registration of households and distribution of ITNs to minimize potential exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.
9. Use existing data sources from the implementation level<sup>9</sup> that can be updated or projected to an estimated population to be covered with ITNs. Where these data are not available, health facility staff should be asked to provide population data by village for all of the communities in their catchment area. Buffer stock can be added to estimated ITN needs to ensure sufficient nets are available to reach all households.

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<sup>2</sup> The key messages have been reviewed and endorsed by WHO.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/malaria-and-the-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>5</sup> Such as hard-to-reach and marginalized populations, internally displaced persons and refugees, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Where a strategy to get ITNs out increases the need for ITNs, a staggered distribution by prioritized areas will provide time to source additional nets.

<sup>7</sup> For example, integrating ITNs in community health worker packages, particularly where integrated community case management (iCCM) is taking place.

<sup>8</sup> [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPE\\_use-2020.2-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPE_use-2020.2-eng.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Community health worker registers, previous registration data from ITN or seasonal malaria chemoprophylaxis (SMC) campaigns, neglected tropical disease (NTD) community registers, etc.

10. Consider the need to assign monitors to ensure that people respect the guidance around limitations for gatherings of groups of people and physical distancing of at least one metre. Discussions around the implication of having police, military or other uniformed personnel to keep situations controlled should be tabled early in the planning period.
11. Maintain to the greatest extent possible all recommendations in place prior to COVID-19 relating to best practices for logistics and supply chain management and accountability for ITNs, including those related to multi-product campaigns<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/amp-tools/>