

Supervision of an ITN mass distribution campaign in the context of COVID-19 transmission

V1. October 2020

Remember the COVID-19 infection prevention measures¹

- Maintain physical distance of at least one metre from all others, except immediate members of the family or people with whom you share accommodation
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer or wash them with soap and water. WHO recommends washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap or hand sanitizer are not available, rub hands vigorously with wood ashes
- Avoid going to crowded places
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Practise respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately dispose of the tissue² and wash your hands
- If you have fever or respiratory symptoms, you should stay home and not go to work
- Wear a fabric mask if there is widespread community transmission, and especially where physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Correctly use and dispose of any COVID-19 infection prevention materials provided. Follow national government guidance for disposal
- Maintain all other measures described even when wearing protective equipment
- Keep up to date with the latest guidance and regulations put in place by WHO and the national government

NOTE: As the pandemic evolves, WHO updates the infection prevention measures based on new scientific findings. Check for any updates on <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>.

Core AMP documents: *Key guidance for distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) during COVID-19 transmission*
Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission See: <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

Understand the purpose of supervision

Supervision is the act of observing a person or activity to make sure that everything included in the relevant standard operating procedure (SOP)/checklist/job aid is done correctly and safely. Supervisors can provide feedback to those they are observing and to organizers of the overall project or programme.

Supervision is a critical aspect of the success of any ITN campaign distribution to help improve performance and achieve results. Results-oriented supervision aims to ensure informed decision-making as part of improving implementation quality of planned activities. Supervision allows campaign supervisors and managers to:

¹ <https://www.WHO.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

² Follow WHO and national guidance on waste disposal. Waste should be disposed of appropriately where it will not be in the environment risking contaminating others. See also: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-the-covid-19-virus-interim-guidance>

- Provide feedback, ensuring that information collected is used to improve performance and as a basis for decision-making
- Identify lessons learned, challenges and “better practices” that assist with understanding how and why certain approaches and strategies did or did not work and the factors that contributed to achievement of outcomes

Supervision should be planned based on the objectives and expected results defined for critical activities (such as household registration, ITN distribution, social and behaviour change (SBC), supply chain management, etc.) that are designed to lead to ITN access and use in targeted households. The objectives and expected results of each activity should be detailed in the campaign plan of action and in the respective action plans for SBC and logistics.

Adapt plans for supervision to the COVID-19 context

With the restrictions in place in many countries for prevention of COVID-19 transmission, plans for supervision will need to be reviewed and adjusted, in collaboration with key stakeholders, in an effort to limit the amount of external contact with communities, particularly the most remote and hard-to-reach where community transmission of COVID-19 may not be ongoing. This is true even where COVID-19 restrictions are being lifted as mass ITN campaign planning should still be taking a precautionary approach.

As much as possible, remote support should be included in budgets to ensure sufficient airtime and internet connectivity for effective communication and timely decision-making for resolution of bottlenecks.

Recognizing the importance of limiting contacts between different levels (e.g. national and remote, rural communities) and also the need to ensure as high quality implementation of activities as possible, national malaria programmes should plan and budget for reinforced supervision (quantity and quality) at the community and sub-district levels and focused supervision (problematic areas based on previous experience) for other levels in terms of in-person activities.

Define levels for supervision

Supervision is generally planned to take place from a number of different levels: community, health facility, sub-district, district, region and national. It is important to remember, when planning for the different levels of supervision, that while the campaign only occurs every three years, it must respect the hierarchical system established by the Ministry of Health. For example, national level personnel only have direct supervisory authority over regional level personnel and, as such, their role is primarily to be that of national/internal monitors, allowing them to observe activities and work with supervisors at different levels to build their capacity to manage identified challenges and problems.

Regional and national level supervision should be maintained but, to minimize movement between areas, be scaled back in terms of travel to the interior parts of districts. Supervision from the regional and national levels should have a lighter touch³, focused more on remote support to district level supervisors, review of data and feedback on areas for improvement and troubleshooting by telephone, WhatsApp or other distance means.

Reinforce and expand community-level (local) supervision

All efforts should be made to avoid opportunities for COVID-19 transmission by minimizing movement between areas and contact with communities during the ITN campaign. Essential tasks, such as ensuring quality of activities, collecting and compiling data and addressing and resolving

³ “Light-touch” supervision indicates fewer in-person direct-observation supervision visits as compared to the previous pre-COVID-19 era.

problems, should be done, as much as possible, by community/local level supervisors. Reinforcing and expanding community and/or district-level supervision may be even more critical where there are limitations on the movement of personnel from the national/regional level due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In all communities, there are people who have skills and capacity that can be used to supervise campaign implementation quality. These skills may include communication, mathematics, inventory or leadership experience. People with these skills, as long as they meet the recruitment criteria, may include teachers, treasurers of associations and clubs, small business owners, community and religious leaders, etc. As much as possible, leverage on the existing skills available to minimize movement between areas. Community supervisors can be supported in their work by community leaders⁴, health facility staff and district supervisors as much as possible.

In addition, there may be national and international non-governmental organizations working within the community, already known and trusted by community members even if they originate from outside the community. Representatives from these organizations will also be in a good position to act as supervisors and/or monitors.

It may be possible to strengthen the supervisory role of each supervisor at the district, sub-district, or health facility by using community members to assist. For example, a supervisor at the health facility level could identify a community member in each village in the catchment area of the health facility, or in a defined housing area (such as a housing estate or high rise) in urban environments, to report back information on the first day of household registration and/or ITN distribution in the health facility catchment area, using a brief checklist of activities to watch over. Questions could include:

- Were all households notified of the imminent household registration and/or ITN distribution prior to campaign implementation?
- Have all households sent representatives to pick up their nets at the fixed point distribution point (where this is the strategy) on the distribution day?
- Did the door-to-door household registration and or ITN distribution (where this is the strategy) include all households?
- Did households receive health education from campaign personnel during the door-to-door household registration and/or ITN distribution (where this is the strategy)?
- Were there any difficulties with the household registration and/or ITN distribution from the perspective of the community?

If there were difficulties, the community member should immediately report them to the supervisor at the health facility level.

Plan appropriately for supervision to minimize unnecessary community contacts

When designing the adapted strategy for ITN distribution in the COVID-19 context, the roles and responsibilities of supervisors from each level of the supervision structure, as well as the number of supervisors planned, should be carefully reviewed with a view to limiting unnecessary contacts with communities and households. Households may be less comfortable with people from “outside” their community in terms of COVID-19 exposure. Plan national, regional, district, sub-district and health facility supervision based on experiences with previous campaigns, partner experiences, or other activities to focus on areas:

- That were problematic during previous activities

⁴ For further information on the potential role of community leaders in giving support to supervisors, see AMP guidance: *Engagement of community leaders in the context of COVID-19*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

- Where it may be more difficult to ensure respect for COVID-19 infection prevention measures (e.g. overcrowded living conditions such as in refugee camps)
- Where there are divisions among communities or insecurity that may affect the safety and security of teams or where a community supervisor is covering a vast area where teams are working

Ensure that markets are visited to assess the level of access to campaign ITNs in the private sector during and post-distribution, as there may be higher motivation to sell new ITNs for much needed cash during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding campaign ITNs in markets will signal a need to strengthen SBC messages and/or to strengthen supply chain management. Similarly, areas known for misuse, particularly fishing communities, should be targeted to assess level of compliance with keeping ITNs in households and using them for malaria prevention. Again, strengthening SBC messages is required if ITNs are subject to misuse.

During all supervision contacts/meetings, both parties (supervisor and supervisee) should be wearing masks, a distance of at least one metre should be respected, and the contact/meeting should be outdoors if at all possible.

Ensure COVID-19 infection prevention is supervised at all levels

Supervisors at all levels will be responsible for ensuring that COVID-19 infection prevention mechanisms put in place are respected and adhered to. Standard questions should be included in checklists, questionnaires and other supervision and monitoring tools to assess whether masks are being worn properly, physical distancing is being adequately carried out, and COVID-19 protective materials are available in sufficient quantities (both with teams and as reserve stock). In addition, the tools should assess whether waste management guidance for non-reusable personal protective equipment (PPE) is being adhered to.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities of supervisors

Roles and responsibilities for supervisors at each level must be clearly defined in the supervision plan and reinforced in SOPs, checklists and other supervisory tools. This includes for the community level supervisors, who may have more tasks within the COVID-19 context in an effort to limit the number of outside contacts from supervisors at higher levels in the Ministry of Health structure. The roles and responsibilities of supervisors may include some or all of the following, as well as additional aspects based on the campaign-specific plans:

- Supporting collection of information for microplanning and/or participating in microplanning workshops
- Identification and listing of campaign personnel based on specific criteria established for the different cadres required (e.g. door-to-door or distribution point teams, social and behaviour change, logistics, etc.)
- Developing and submitting lists of campaign personnel with required information for payment planning in a timely manner
- Facilitation or oversight of training of campaign personnel using whatever options have been selected, such as virtual or face-to-face and, in the case of face-to-face trainings, identifying appropriate venues and ensuring that all COVID-19 infection prevention measures have been put in place (e.g. venues organized with sufficient space between seats, provision of handwashing stations, etc.)
- Managing the supply of campaign materials for data collection, ITN distribution, SBC, COVID-19 infection prevention, etc.
- Ensuring that daily presence lists are filled in for campaign personnel in an effort to facilitate timely payment

- Verifying adherence to the COVID-19 infection prevention protocols for campaign personnel under their responsibility, including health checks, supply of materials such as masks, soap and hand sanitizer and ensuring that campaign personnel respect the no-touch and physical distancing measures that have been put in place
- Assessing and verifying adherence of campaign personnel for specific campaign activities including:
 - Supply chain logistics (such as spot checks at storage locations to assess compliance with tracking procedures and undertake physical inventories to verify stocks)
 - SBC, including ensuring that households receive the correct campaign (malaria, ITN and COVID-19) messages during door-to-door distribution, and verifying that planned radio spots and programmes take place within the agreed timeframe and at the correct frequency
 - Door-to-door registration and/or distribution of ITNs (in order to ensure compliance with COVID-19 infection prevention, definition of household, ITN allocation, communication of key messages)
 - Data collection and management (verifying completeness and correctness of data collected by teams and/or summarized at each level)
- Organizing and participating in daily review meetings, whether virtual or face-to-face, in order to provide observations on successes and challenges in an effort to ensure continuous quality improvements during implementation
- Communicating regularly with the supervisors at other levels of the supervision structure, as well as with different sub-committee leads where specific issues arise regarding, for example, rumours about the ITNs being distributed in some communities

Ensure criteria for selection of supervisors are defined and adhered to

Careful consideration should be given to the selection of supervisors to ensure that they can fulfil the tasks, roles and responsibilities required in their terms of reference. At the national, regional, district and health facility level, the selection of some supervisors that exist within the MoH structure is by position and not by criteria. All supervisors from within the MoH structure must be trained, regardless of previous campaign (ITN or other) experience.

The role of community supervisors is likely to be expanded for ITN campaigns in the context of COVID-19. This is the level at which rapid decision-making is likely to be most important. After roles and responsibilities are defined, as above, it will be important to develop the criteria for selection, which may include (among others):

- Level of education, which national malaria programmes should define based on context of the area being targeted
- Gender, to ensure a balance among community supervisors selected
- Experience with previous campaigns or other activities that require similar skills, such as teaching, accounting, etc.
- Sufficient seniority to be respected by members of their communities
- Ability to lead teams and resolve problems quickly
- Experience with communicating with families about health or other issues
- Ownership of and familiarity with a smartphone where data are to be collected and/or transmitted electronically
- Ownership of a personal means of transport (such as bicycle or motorcycle)

The most appropriate people to be selected are people who are already delivering health or other services at the community level.

Where payments will be done through Mobile Money, ownership of a phone that can receive such transfers will be a key consideration for selection. Where movement is restricted and where feedback is sent daily using summary data and key information for action, supervisors must be able to analyse and act on what they have received with limited support from higher level supervisors. Given the importance of ensuring clear understanding between campaign personnel and targeted households, the ability to speak the local language is a required versus a desirable skill.

Depending on the advice from the government about who is most vulnerable to COVID-19, the criteria may include exclusions, such as people over 60 years of age or with underlying health conditions. The criteria will vary by country but should be clearly defined to ensure that the right people are selected to achieve campaign results.

A typical problem in mass ITN campaigns is non-adherence to criteria for selection of personnel, with people selected more on the basis of who they know rather than what they know. Given the potential challenges that may occur with implementation of the ITN campaign during the COVID-19 context, adherence to the criteria for selection is critical, as is working with respected community leaders for selection of personnel that will be trusted to go door-to-door to deliver ITNs or to register households and provide clear and consistent information about how fixed site distribution will be managed.

Clearly define supervision and logistics supply chain needs when determining roles and responsibilities

Many countries have adopted door-to-door distribution of ITNs, which has the challenge of ensuring timely resupply to distribution teams to meet daily targets⁵. In some countries, the ITN resupply is a task of the team itself, with ITNs pre-positioned in the communities where teams will work each day to limit the time spent moving back and forth to collect more ITNs. In other countries, the ITN resupply is done by someone other than the team, often using a porter, bicycle, motorcycle, cart, truck or other means of transport appropriate to the local context.

Where the community supervisor resupplies the ITNs, it is important that the supervisor is not overloaded with all the tasks assigned. A list of the responsibilities of the community supervisor should be developed to assess whether a single person can effectively supervise teams for data collection and quality of implementation as well as resupply ITNs to teams in a timely manner. Generally, this is not recommended due to the risks for both the programmatic aspects (e.g. poor-quality implementation, incoherent data) and the logistics aspects (e.g. late resupply and delayed implementation of activities leading to extensions in time planned for the campaign).

Define a clear feedback and communication system

The supervision plan should clearly describe the feedback system that will be put in place to ensure timely sharing of information and data-driven decision-making. During the day, text or WhatsApp messages from supervisors to their contacts at management level should alert campaign staff immediately to any issues. Feedback mechanisms should also include daily review meetings (either virtual or face-to-face) where supervisors can present the results of their daily work and issues or challenges that need to be addressed. Where face-to-face daily review meetings will take place, COVID-19 infection prevention measures should be adhered to and the duration for the meeting should be reduced to avoid people being in close proximity for extended periods. Planning for face-to-face meetings should include development of an agenda to ensure time can be respected. These meetings should begin with a review of supervision data, so that the quantitative data is discussed

⁵ For further information on resupplying ITNs, see AMP guidance: *Accountability and ITN tracking for last mile logistics in the context of COVID-19 transmission*. <https://allianceformalariaiprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

first and any necessary actions taken. As much as possible, daily review meetings should take place outdoors.

WhatsApp groups should be established, where network access permits, for supervisors and their main contacts at different levels. These may include district-specific groups for personnel at district and sub-district levels, multi-level groups to ensure information is passing rapidly from district to regional to national campaign staff and personnel, specific groups for logistics or SBC, etc. Ensure that different groups have moderators and group rules and that essential information is communicated, such as a serious incident that risks spreading COVID-19 or has a potential ramification for the security of teams working on the ITN campaign.

Use technology where possible

Consider the data that are available throughout the campaign planning and implementation period and how they can be used to support virtual or technological solutions to either improve or reduce the need for in-person supervision.

- Use the established WhatsApp groups. Data and reports can be sent to all supervisors as they are finalized, ensuring that timely information is in the hands of individuals that can take decisions around how to improve the implementation quality of activities and ensure high ITN access and use at the end of the distribution period. Common issues can be identified and resolved and rumours and mis/disinformation tracked, reported and acted on rapidly if necessary
- Establish WhatsApp, phone or other means for communities to report on challenges with the distribution, including engagement of community-based organizations for independent monitoring and provision of feedback
- Consider options for daily review meetings that are not face-to-face, including using WhatsApp or Facetime to send photos of data forms, discuss daily findings and correct any data errors, as well as to plan for the next day's activities

National malaria programmes will have different options to consider based on the context of the country, level of access to networks and capacity and familiarity of campaign personnel with technology. Sometimes persons more familiar with more mobile phones can be paired with persons who may struggle with mobile phone operations. For example, the person with more mobile phone skills can send texts and enter data as directed by the team member with more programme or community knowledge or skills.

Take advantage of the real-time nature of mobile technology. For example, paper-based supervision reporting systems and in-person supervision usually rely on end-of-day reporting. Using mobile technology (including ordinary phone calls, text messages, WhatsApp groups) allows supervisors at peripheral and other levels to report campaign issues instantly. Real-time reporting of issues is especially important on the first and second day of implementation of the household registration and/or ITN distribution so any issues or patterns of issues can be addressed early in the phases of the campaign.

The following are some other ideas for gathering information using technology, resulting in reduced contact. Some of these ideas below almost encompass "monitoring" but they can also be considered as extending the reach of supervision:

- Undertake quantitative or qualitative monitoring during the household registration and/or ITN distribution through, for example, phone interviews, which limit face-to-face contact. For example:
 - Lists of people from training, advocacy meetings, etc. can be used for spot checks by phone. Simple questionnaires can be developed specific to the role and

responsibilities of a person to see if they were trained and understood content, can effectively perform tasks, received payment as planned (timing and amount), etc.

- Where phone numbers of household representatives are collected as part of the registration process, these can be randomly sampled with calls to collect monitoring data based on a standard questionnaire. Data can be compiled by community, sub-district and district. Areas not meeting the set thresholds for quality can be flagged for follow-up with community supervisors.
- Community, religious and traditional leaders, as well as representatives of civil society or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the targeted area with communities, can be called and interviewed about campaign implementation and management to identify challenges and areas for improvement. However, it might be optimal to establish the list of names and working phone numbers of the leaders and local NGOs prior to the campaign, give them two to three points on which to provide feedback, and give them a phone number to call or text the requested information at a specific time.
- A hotline can be set up for people to call to ask questions, make complaints, etc. and information can be relayed to the community and other supervisor(s) working in the area.
- Timely and effective analysis and feedback of quantitative mobile data:
 - As noted above, during household registration and/or ITN campaign distribution, timeliness of feedback on the first and second days is very important. Qualitative data (phone calls, WhatsApp messages, for example) will be analysed in real-time. However, those responsible for analysis of quantitative data (from web or mobile data collection) will need to be prepared to work at night on at least the first and second night of the household registration and/or ITN distribution to detect any issues or potential problems and pass these to supervisors before they meet with local workers during the mornings of the second and third day of household registration and/or ITN distribution. This will allow them to make decisions and discuss how to address issues and problems with the field workers before they begin their work on the second and third day.

Provide integrated tools and standard operating procedures to supervisors

Given that there may be challenges with implementing detailed training due to limitations on numbers of people gathering in groups, supervisors should be provided with tools such as standard operating procedures and checklists. Each of the tools must contain the requirement to adhere to COVID-19 prevention measures: respect for physical distancing, handwashing or hand sanitizing on a regular basis, wearing of masks (if mandated). Examples of tools to be provided are:

- Standard operating procedures that detail their tasks and the data verification procedures for which they are responsible
- Integrated supervision checklists (that cover all activities – logistics, SBC, M&E, finance)
- Incident report forms to ensure standardized reporting on different issues arising (ITN theft, campaign personnel with suspected COVID-19, etc.)
- A communication list for different purposes (e.g. number to send data to, number to call in case of serious incident, etc.)

Community supervisors should collect data on a daily basis on the activities of registration and/or distribution teams, whether door-to-door or fixed site, not just to verify numbers of ITNs distributed against the plan but to feed back immediately areas where campaign workers need to adapt or improve implementation, e.g. continue to maintain the physical distancing regulations.

District and sub-district supervisors should be in regular communication with the community supervisors in order to best target their time and efforts. For example, using the same integrated supervision checklist, district or sub-district supervisors may undertake follow-up visits to areas identified as problematic to ensure that solutions and adaptations for improving quality are being implemented as recommended. They may also need to provide support in collection, verification and submission of daily data where phone connections are problematic.

Plan and budget for COVID-19 infection prevention materials and vehicles for supervision

All supervisors, as well as drivers and any other people involved in supervisory activities, must receive PPE to ensure that they adhere to COVID-19 infection prevention measures while implementing their activities. Where face-to-face supervision will take place and people will move in vehicles, COVID-19 infection prevention should include materials for properly cleaning the vehicle, disinfecting high-touch surfaces at the end of each day and, as far as possible, keeping vehicle windows open. It will be important to develop and finalize the supervision and monitoring strategy early to properly quantify the PPE needs and ensure they are included in the budget.

Where face-to-face supervision is being implemented, plan and budget for an appropriate number of vehicles to ensure that physical distancing regulations are maintained. Ideally, the number of supervisors per vehicle should be limited to one to two plus the driver to avoid people being unable to maintain physical distancing during travel. While increasing the number of vehicles may have a significant budget implication, improved targeting of supervision may help with balancing out supervisors and vehicles that are actually necessary. Where possible, criteria for selection of supervisors should include ownership of a means of transport (e.g. bicycle or motorcycle) to ensure that they will be able to move at limited cost and respect the COVID-19 infection prevention measures that have been put in place for the campaign.

Make decisions on remuneration of supervisors

Considerations about remuneration of supervisors, particularly those that will be working long hours remotely by phone to discuss identified problems and find acceptable solutions, must be considered during the planning and budgeting for the campaign. As part of financial management and payment planning, national malaria programmes should propose a schedule for remuneration of supervisors that are working virtually, including the means of verification for work accomplished. These may include random spot checks via phone calls to interview key campaign staff and ascertain their availability for discussion, rapid decision-making and problem resolution. Means of verification may also include establishing a time sheet for work specific to the campaign to illustrate, in general terms, the amount of time spent during and outside office hours on campaign issue management.

If personal mobile phones of the supervisors and others will be used for calls and texts, consideration should be given to include cellular network credit in planning and budgeting.

Ensure that health checks take place every day before starting activities

Supervisors should be responsible for ensuring that daily health checks take place for the personnel they are directly supervising and that other supervisors at all levels are correctly and consistently implementing the daily health checks. The protocol for infection prevention of COVID-19 for campaign workers should be defined, explained during training and implemented and monitored by supervisors at each level⁶. Daily reports from the health checks should be communicated to the appropriate level as defined in the protocol and explained during the training.

⁶ See AMP guidance for a discussion of remuneration for campaign personnel when unable to work because of signs or symptoms of COVID-19: *Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19*.
<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

Ensure supervision is supportive

Supervisors should be trained to give supportive feedback to the workers they supervise. It should be recognized that the work of registration and distribution teams, supply chain personnel, SBC personnel, etc. is particularly stressful and difficult in the context of COVID-19. Workers should be appreciated for what they are doing and should be thanked. When correction is needed, the supervisor should provide constructive feedback in private and encourage the workers to put into practice immediately what they have been advised to change.

Supervisors are also themselves doing a stressful and difficult job. Ensure that those persons they report to, whether supervisors at the next level, or the national malaria programme, are supportive and that feedback is constructive.