

# **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND HOW IT AFFECTS LGBT PERSONS IN NIGERIA.**



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## Executive Summary

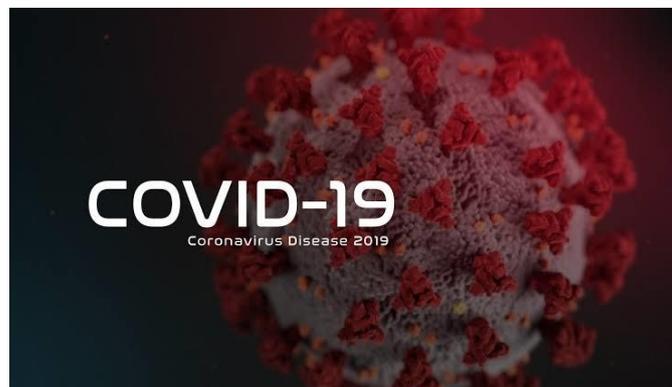
The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases continue to rise globally. It is reported to be over 1.7 million with the number of death over 100,000 and over 450,000 having recovered ([WHO Situation Report 84 on COVID-19](#), 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2020). With the lock down orders and procedures being put in place, it is most definitely inevitable that such a pandemic will have an adverse effect on the vulnerable groups in the society most especially the LGBT communities across the world.

It is therefore important that the Bisi Alimi Foundation which is a diaspora initiative that aims to change the hearts and minds of Nigerians and accelerate social acceptance of LGBT people bring to light these adverse effects on LGBT people and recommend ways we can work to ameliorate these effects. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a great need to intervene and carry out activities that would assist people both LGBT and non-LGBT in dealing with the negative effects of the pandemic and these included holding webinars where the effects of COVID-19, the spread and preventive measures were discussed.

This therefore serves as a reference for public sensitization on what the virus is, how it is spread, and protective measures to take. It also brings to light, the possible negative effects the pandemic will have on LGBT persons in Nigeria and even the general populace like the increase in physical, sexual and emotional abuse due to lock in with abusers and the difficulty in accessing healthcare services. Some possible solutions on how to ameliorate such negative effects like the registering of organisations offering healthcare services to LGBT people as essential workers to aid movement and the possibility of moving service deliveries online to aid access.

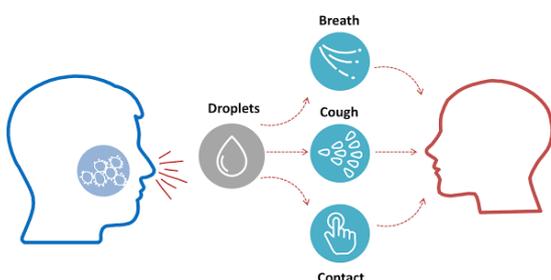
## INTRODUCTION

[COVID-19](#) as coined by the World Health Organisation means Corona Virus Disease 2019. This is term for the disease caused by a new corona virus family type known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which causes illnesses ranging from common cold to severe respiratory syndrome. It was first identified in Wuhan, China in 2019 thus the “19” in the name.



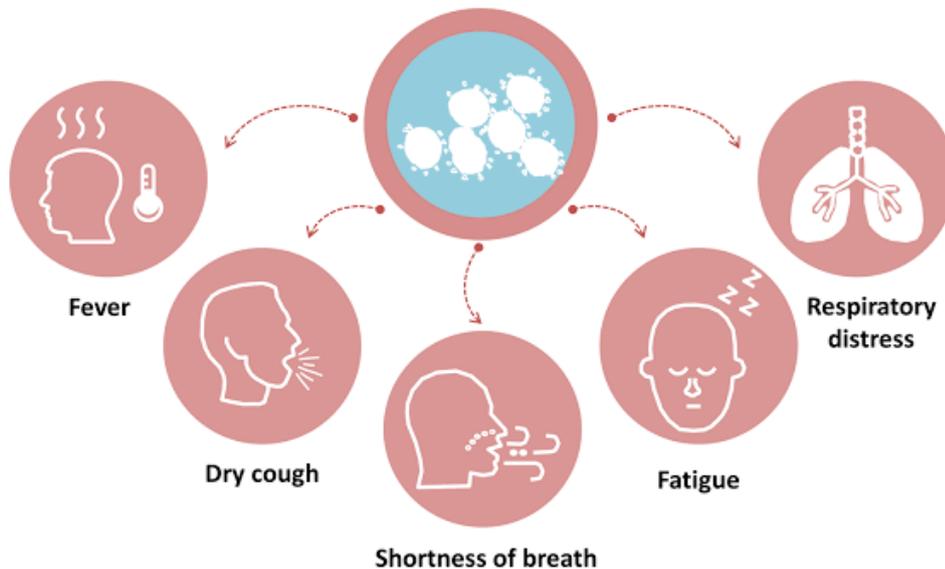
## SPREAD OR TRANSMISSION

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets are relatively heavy, do not travel far and quickly sink to the ground. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus. These droplets can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, doorknobs and handrails. People



can become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.  
[1]

## SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 INFECTION



Symptoms include, dry cough, sore throat, high temperature of above 38.0°C (100.4°F) which is a fever, difficulty in breathing, body ache and tiredness, and in some cases diarrhoea, a runny nose or nausea.

## FATALITY RATE OF COVID-19

According to the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses),<sup>[2]</sup> most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. However, we have found that increasingly young people without underlying health issues are also dying from the impact of the virus.

## PROTECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19

The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. Take care of your health and protect others by doing the following;

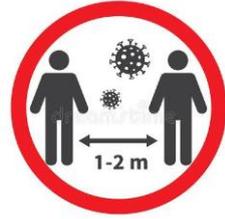
<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic: Public Advice  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic: Public Advice.  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

- Regularly clean your hands with a 60% alcohol-based hand rub or wash them under running water with soap for at least 20 seconds. This is because washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain social distancing. Maintain at least 2 metre (6 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Avoid social gatherings and crowded places.



This is because when someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.



- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. This is because hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Practice respiratory hygiene. Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Also, wear facemask if you are sick. This is because droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.



- Endeavour to always clean and disinfect surfaces around you frequently. Surfaces like tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. This is because the virus could land on surfaces where an infected person coughs or sneezes or where someone who has been in contact with the virus touches the surface. The virus can stay on a surface for up to 24 hours.

- Maintain a balanced diet and exercise regularly in order to boost your immune system.

- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention early and call in advance. Follow the directions



- of your local health authority. This is because national and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider or your national to date information on whether COVID-19 is spreading in your area. They are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

- It is important at this period to obey lock down rules where the government has made such orders by staying indoors and avoiding social gatherings.

- For persons who are in or have recently within the past 14 days visited areas where COVID-19 is spreading, you are advised to self-isolate for 14 days and stay at home if you begin to feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as headache and slight runny nose, until you recover. If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call in advance and tell your provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers.



## TREATMENT OF THE COVID-19

Currently, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments.

## LIKELY EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY

Apart from the fact that just anybody can be infected by the virus, it is without doubt that LGBT persons will be specifically affected by the whole pandemic in different ways. Violence against LGBT persons or Homophobia is not a new trend in Nigeria, and has been perpetrated by family members, intimate partners, security operatives and the general public over the years. For details on this, see [report](#) by TIERS and others.<sup>[3]</sup> This is likely to increase due to issues of security, health, economic worries and religious beliefs.



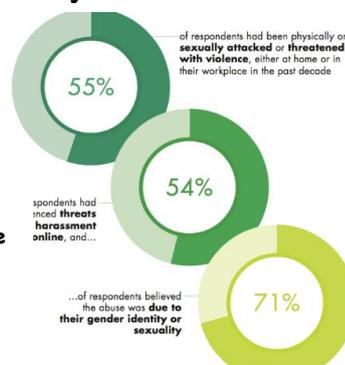
Due to the lockdown which is presently being implemented across Nigeria and other African countries, there has been heightened tensions and strains which has been accentuated by cramped and confined living spaces and has left a lot of LGBT persons at the mercy of their violators. An example of this is the arrest of 20 LGBT persons from a safe house in Uganda on March 29, 2020. This could affect them physically and mentally. There are already cases of emotional abuses going on as a result of the fact that some overly religious individuals believe the virus to be a plague that has been sent by the Supreme being to punish the world for sins committed most especially homosexuality.

Another effect is on the health care of LGBT persons. Access to health for LGBT persons has always been a challenge even prior to the pandemic. It is therefore most likely that the stay-in order will make it a lot more difficult for LGBT persons to access essential health services as they may not be able to reach organisations, networks that provide support especially as it relates to psychosocial support, STIs and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

There is also the issue of increased cyber violence (stalking, harassment, unsolicited messages, hate speech) against LGBT persons on social media <sup>[4]</sup> which will obviously be more active during this period as a result of the stay in. We have received reported cases of such online messages, calling for God to 'rid the world of homosexuals using the virus'.

Lastly, there is the economic effect which is general to the society but specific to LGBT persons as a vulnerable group in Nigeria. A lot of LGBT persons due to rejections from family and friends cannot fend for themselves and in some cases are forced to

Culled from the BAF research on the effects of homo/bi/transphobia on the lives of LGBT people in Nigeria



<sup>3</sup> The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS), (2017) 2017 Report on Human Rights Violations based on Real or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Nigeria. <https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-Human-Rights-Violations-Reports-Based-on-SOGI.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Bisi Alimi Foundation, (2017) "Not dancing to their music": The Effects of Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia on the lives of LGBT people in Nigeria. <https://www.bisialimifoundation.org/site/bisialimifoundation/assets/pdf/not-dancing-to-their-music-main-copy.pdf>

move in with friends or toxic family members which make them even more vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Organisations and networks offering health services to LGBT persons should be registered as health care workers for the purpose of getting permission to move around to offer health services to LGBT persons. This could be done in collaboration with the AIDS Control Agency in the state.
- Organisations can also investigate the possibility of having continued access to services virtually. This could include online peer sessions, psychosocial counselling, mentoring, online demands and service delivery etc.
- Public sensitization on the COVID-19 pandemic and how it is spread, in order to avoid the peddling of fake news and hate speeches against LGBT persons.
- Online reporting systems be put in place by organisations to track cases of human rights abuse and support such victims.
- Funding of safe houses and financial or material assistance to LGBT persons who need assistance or are in a vulnerable state of homelessness at this period.

For any information you would like to get about the Bisi Alimi Foundation, visit our website at [www.bisialimifoundation.org](http://www.bisialimifoundation.org)

**For any questions, comments or inquiries, you can email us at [info@bisialimifoundation.org](mailto:info@bisialimifoundation.org) or contact Sesugh Ivande at [sesugh.ivande@bisialimifoundation.org](mailto:sesugh.ivande@bisialimifoundation.org)**

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