GLOBAL EMERGENCY BULLETIN

Catholic Relief Services and our partners across the globe are supporting high-risk communities on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, our critical humanitarian and development programs are ongoing.

GLOBAL RESPONSE

CRS and our partners have reached over 10 million people to date with comprehensive programming to prevent the spread of COVID-19, bolster the capacity of local health responders, and assist extremely vulnerable families with the compounded impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

CRS is well-positioned to play a vital role in the vaccine rollout. A top priority for CRS is ensuring that national vaccine strategies assist people who may be beyond the reach of public health systems. Because of our work with some of the world’s most remote communities, CRS and our Church partners can reach especially vulnerable populations.

We will help address the barriers to vaccination faced by the most vulnerable groups—including women, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living in extreme poverty, migrants, and displaced people and refugees. For example, we will work with our partners and other organizations to identify vulnerable groups and locations, devise outreach strategies, and ensure that those who need to travel to a vaccination center can do so safely. We will also participate in advocacy efforts at all levels to promote equitable access.

We will build on our experience in supply chain management, such as the distribution of more than 40 million insecticide-treated bed nets through health ministries in 2019 alone. We will also use our networks and programs to educate local leaders and communities about the vaccines.

CRS will coordinate with health ministries and the World Health Organization to respond to country-specific priorities, including:

- Targeting and monitoring vaccine efforts to ensure that national strategies assist people who may be out of a public health system’s reach.
- Ensuring efficient programming, and tracking vaccine distribution and service delivery.
- Training health partners and responders.
- Supporting vaccine cold-chain logistics.
- Providing vaccine information and raising awareness across communities.

CRS staff in Guatemala demonstrate correct hand-washing techniques to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Photo by Eric Salguero/Cinema Studio for CRS
Here is a snapshot of our emergency responses around the world:

**MIDDLE EAST:** In Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, your gifts have helped support hospitals and medical staff responding to urgent needs. Hospitals in Egypt and Gaza received protective equipment for employees. Jerusalem and West Bank frontline workers received trainings on infection prevention and control.

**ASIA:** Communities in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar have received cash assistance, hygiene supplies and protective gear. In Indonesia, CRS has conducted an online emergency simulation exercise to prepare for any future disaster. We have also adapted responses to potential flooding for families living in refugee settlements in Bangladesh.

**EAST AFRICA:** COVID-19 program adaptations have benefited more than 1.5 million people, providing important messaging, hygiene supplies and food distribution. In Uganda, CRS transformed and equipped the Mandela National Stadium as an isolation facility for COVID-19 patients. In September 2020, the facility was officially transferred to the Uganda Ministry of Health. In addition to COVID-19, locust swarms across East Africa are exacerbating ongoing humanitarian issues.

**CENTRAL AFRICA:** CRS has provided prevention and awareness messaging along with hygiene kits for communities. In Benin, elementary schools received critical hand-washing stations and, in Nigeria, community health workers received facemasks and sanitizer.

**SOUTHERN AFRICA:** Humanitarian assistance is increasing in response to dry seasons in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, and in the conflict-affected regions of Mozambique. CRS and our partners are providing hygiene supplies and awareness messages around gender-based violence during the pandemic. With South Africa host to 94% of COVID-19 cases in the region,1 there are widespread concerns that the South African variant of the virus is more contagious.

**WEST AFRICA:** CRS is expanding to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while maintaining health and development programs, and has supported nearly 2 million people with COVID-19 programming. We have distributed weekly rations to quarantined families in Sierra Leone and protective equipment in Liberia and Ghana. In Niger and Burkina Faso and Liberia, hand-washing stations have been installed in health facilities.

**LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN:** In South and Central America, CRS has provided families with hygiene kits. In Venezuela, refugees have received safe shelter and cash assistance. We have also distributed masks to students in Honduras and food parcels to families in Mexico.

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**Global “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence**

With families staying home during COVID-19 lockdowns, many women have found themselves confined with an abuser. UN Women is calling for a global collective effort to stop this “shadow pandemic.” Many CRS COVID-19 activities incorporate psychosocial support, and training and referral for gender-based violence.

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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data [...] have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified.

UN Women