The World Health Organization has now declared coronavirus a pandemic – The number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase with over 125,000 confirmed cases across more than 116 countries and territories, creating fear and impacting economic, educational, transportation, social and health services. Community transmission has been noted in several countries including Iran, Italy, South Korea and the United States. As with past outbreaks, the spread of the coronavirus is putting growing stress on health systems, including risk to health workers, their safety and ability to provide care.

The coronavirus crisis—both in terms of health, economic and social fallout—will have the hardest and most sustained impact on those who are most vulnerable: uninsured or underinsured individuals affected by poverty, many of whom are living with underlying chronic illnesses and have limited access to health services. These are the very people that Americares - and the global network of health center partners we support - serve each and every day.

Americares expertise in infection prevention and control, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, access to medicines, health worker safety, mental health and direct clinical care positions us well to have a positive impact on the fight to combat coronavirus with a focus on helping maintain the health of vulnerable populations and health workers on the front lines.

Over the past month, to ensure health workers can continue to carry out their lifesaving work, Americares has shipped personal protective gear including masks, gloves, gowns, hygiene kits and sanitation wipes to “hot zones” from China to Washington state with additional shipments continually being prepared. We also quickly incorporated coronavirus-specific health education and training into our on-going work and emergency responses across India, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to promote awareness and slow spread.

While the situation is fluid and evolving across the world, Americares coronavirus response strategy focuses on the following activities:

1. Conducting coronavirus-specific interventions and enhancements in our own direct clinical service sites and global health teams across India, Colombia, El Salvador, the Philippines and the US including Puerto Rico
2. Providing outbreak-specific preparedness capacity building for health workers to help slow the spread of the virus and ensure frontline health workers can continue to address patient needs
3. Training in infection prevention control (IPC) for at-risk partner health facilities or those experiencing COVID-19 infections among their patients
4. Sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect health workers most at risk
5. Addressing fear and supporting the mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) needs of patients and health care workers
6. Preparing to mobilize emergency medical teams to provide surge support at health facilities as needed

As you’ll see, Americares strategy is rooted in many of our core programs pillars – in what we do best - allowing us to leverage 40 years of experience in response to this outbreak:
Infection prevention and control (IPC) is one of Americares core program pillars. We have extensive experience in helping local health facilities prepare for and manage infectious diseases while keeping their own staff safe. Our emergency response team has effectively responded to several past disease outbreaks including Ebola in West Africa, Zika in Latin America, dengue and measles in multiple countries and contexts.

In such emergencies, Americares is committed to long-term recovery and health systems strengthening whenever possible. For example, our response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Liberia transitioned to a long-term recovery program that has since become an enduring presence: six years post-outbreak, Americares now has two offices and a warehouse in Liberia and runs robust community health programming.

We expect our coronavirus response to be long-term and focused not only on response and recovery, but on building preparedness for a future likely characterized by routine epidemics such as this one. Americares specializes in disaster preparedness — both in terms of natural disasters like hurricanes and disease outbreaks like coronavirus. Over the past decade (starting with the Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011), Americares has prioritized emergency preparedness at the same level as emergency response and recovery. We work with front-line health workers in health posts and clinics in some of the most impoverished places in the world to develop preparedness plans that ensure their vital services do not grind to a halt when a disaster - or epidemic - strikes.

Americares and our health facility partners are committed to ensuring that vital primary care can continue as COVID-19 spreads to preserve the health of hundreds of thousands of people. Being available for our patients at this time is paramount: **In addition to coronavirus specific interventions, we will provide the everyday, essential primary care patients need to maintain good health, manage chronic disease, and stay out of the larger health systems’ overtaxed emergency rooms and hospitals.**

We are grateful for your support in these challenging times and will keep you updated on our response.