BACKGROUND
The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus that causes respiratory illness in people and can spread from person-to-person. This virus was first identified during an investigation into a coronavirus outbreak in the city of Wuhan in China. Human coronaviruses, including COVID-19, can spread just like the flu or a cold through the air by coughing or sneezing and through close personal contact (within about six feet) with other people. It can also spread when a person touches an object or surface with the virus on it and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, cough, or shortness of breath.

STIGMA RELATED TO COVID-19
In public health, stigma occurs when a particular group of people are negatively associated with a specific disease. Fear and anxiety can cause stigma toward certain populations during a public health emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Stigma can lead to discrimination, stereotyping, and/or harassment. People of certain races and ethnic groups, from certain countries, and those with other prominent characteristics may be discriminated against because they are thought to be associated with a certain virus, even though those groups have no increased risk of contracting or spreading the disease. People who may be experiencing stigma as a result of COVID-19 include:

- People of Asian or other minority descent and people of Hispanic origin
- People who have traveled
- Emergency responders or health care professionals
- People who have been quarantined or isolated, or are currently in quarantine or isolation
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19
- People who have out-of-state license plates on their vehicles or are from states that have a high number of COVID-19 cases
- People who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness
- People who are non-English speaking

WHY IS ADDRESSING STIGMA IMPORTANT?
Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger towards other people. Stigmatized groups can experience social rejection, physical violence, and may not receive health care, education, housing, or employment. These experiences negatively affect everyone’s mental health and reduce the ability to cope with stresses. Stigmatized groups are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health, especially during pandemics. To avoid discrimination, people in these groups may avoid getting health care when they need it, which could cause more harm to themselves and others.

Stigma, bias, discrimination and other types of aggressions are inappropriate responses to disease. These actions only worsen the threat to public health and make it harder to keep everyone healthy.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
Everyone should be able to feel safe, especially when seeking resources to protect their health. Below are some steps you can take to fight stigma and strengthen the well-being of your community:

Date Released: April 10, 2020
• Understand and share facts about COVID-19:
  o The city of Wuhan in China is simply the location where the coronavirus was first observed. Those with Chinese (or any other) ancestry are not more vulnerable to COVID-19. This disease can make anyone sick, and there is not one race or ethnicity at higher risk for contracting or spreading COVID-19.
  o Someone who has completed a 14-day quarantine or has been released from isolation is not at risk of infecting others.
  o Older adults and people of any age with serious underlying chronic health conditions, such as heart, lung, or kidney disease, are at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19.
  o There are simple things you can do to keep yourself and others healthy, including:
    ▪ Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
    ▪ Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
    ▪ Staying home when you are sick;
    ▪ Covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow, not your hands;
    ▪ Cleaning surfaces frequently; and
    ▪ Wearing a mask in public. Remember “Your mask protects me, my mask protects you”.
• Be compassionate and support those directly impacted by COVID-19, like frontline health care workers, emergency responders, and individuals who have contracted the virus.
• Be compassionate and support those who are in quarantine or isolation because they are protecting the health of their community.
• Stay informed through trusted sources of information, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH).
• Talk with others about the harm stigma causes.
• Be aware of your own biases and take steps to stop them.
• Politely correct any misinformation or discriminatory language you hear or see.
• Do not make assumptions about someone’s health status based on their ethnicity, race, national origin or if they are from out-of-state.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION
PA Department of Health website – https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, help is available. Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting PA to 741-741.

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