

FRIENDSHIP

COVID-19: SITUATION REPORT AND RESPONSE



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968,000

health services performed since Covid-19 detected in Bangladesh

134,500

cloth masks being made for community, staff and government facilities

45,577

medical masks procured for Friendship and government health facilities

1.64 M

people reached through awareness messaging

198

samples collected for Covid-19 testing

Masks for the Masses

At a time when Covid-19 is spreading at an alarming rate, quality masks are essential for mass protection, writes Friendship Founder and Executive Director Runa Khan

Over the past week, the number of Covid-19 infections in Bangladesh has passed the 100,000 mark. We are now officially the 17th worst affected country in the world. Like many of its counterparts, our government has eased the shutdowns it had imposed since March. However, unlike many of the countries opening up their economies, the number of detected infections and deaths here have continued to increase exponentially.

This means that nobody can let down their guard. On the contrary, it is more important than ever before to minimize the risk of infection. This is why I want to highlight the importance of masks. In early March, before the first cases of Covid-19 were detected in Bangladesh, I asked my team to figure out how to produce and distribute masks en masse to reduce the spread of the virus in the communities where we work.

The World Health Organization was unsure at the time about the efficacy of masks, but have since confirmed the effectiveness of nonmedical masks in preventing the spread of Covid-19. It is true that masks do not offer 100% protection and must be paired with social distancing measures and proper hygienic practices in order to limit transmissions. But the reality is that there are many factors stacked against us, including population density, lack of resources, and an exceptionally low investment in public healthcare over the years. At this time of crisis, it is essential to maximise our chances against the virus. Wearing masks and maintaining a physical distance of at least two meters are easy and cost-effective ways to substantially reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

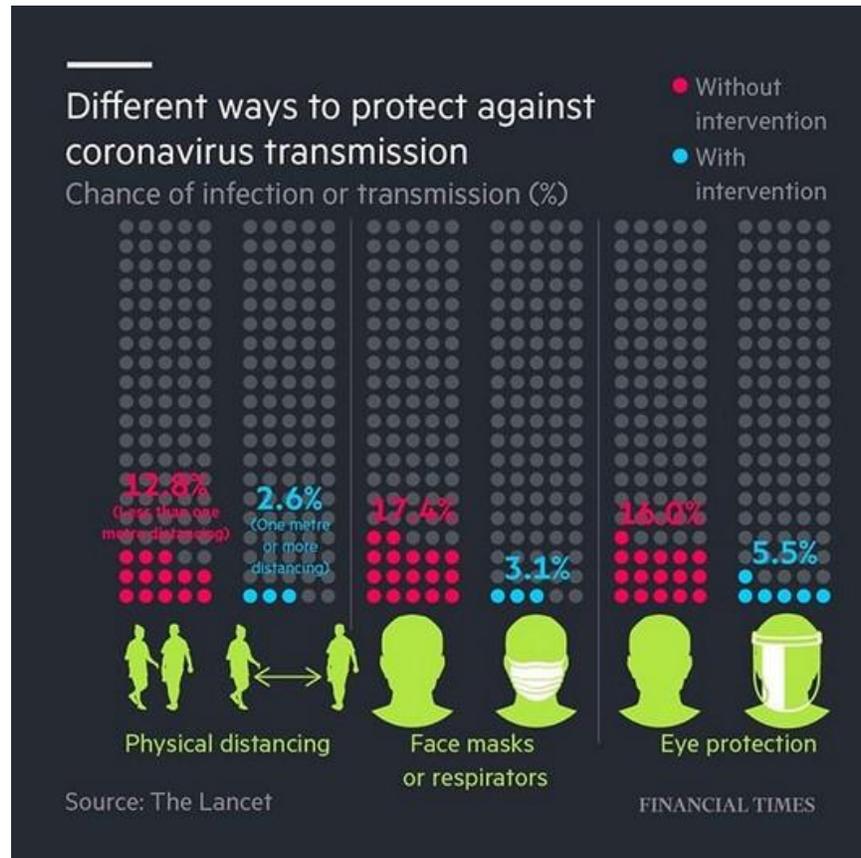


So in early March, after careful consideration, our experts designed a meshed, three-layer mask for field use and four-layer mask for crowd use. They would be made with cotton fabric which prevents entry of particles as small as 0.02 microns (Covid-19 is 0.1 microns), based on a Japanese design which extends from 3cm above the nose to 2 cm below the chin, and covers the cheeks also. The masks are made of a light and airy handloom fabric which allows the wearer to breathe and are fitted with crisscrossing layers and elastics to ensure maximum protection. Both types of mask are reusable and biodegradable to prevent harm to nature.

Once the design was in place, we repurposed all six of our weaving centres to begin production. By mid-April, some 20,000 masks had been made and distributed directly to our staff and to the community. To maximize production, we shipped pre-cut fabric to community tailors to stitch (many of whom had received training and loans from us to set up their businesses). By the end of June 2020, we will have produced over 100,000 masks, 1,200 coveralls and 1,000 gowns for our staff and to the community. These masks have been distributed to some of the most vulnerable workers in our project areas, including police, orphans and jail inmates.

I want to also acknowledge the women who are the heroes behind this effort. Friendship works to empower some of the world's most marginalised and vulnerable women — widows and women who have been abandoned by their husbands, or cast away from society. We find that when given the wherewithal, they are the ones who turn things around, and become heroes in their communities.

In 2009, we opened vocational training centres to train women to achieve independence by selling their products. Now, these women are providing an invaluable service to their own communities and all over Bangladesh during a time of crisis, while also supporting themselves and their families.



After distancing, masks are the most effective protection against the spread of Covid-19 infections

In recent weeks we have lost many dear friends to Covid-19. I have grieved the loss of many, including Mrs. Niloufer Manzur, who was a true role model for me, and a formidable force in educating young people in Dhaka.

In these trying times, there are many things that I am grateful for, which give me hope that we might not have it as bad as some other nations. We have a young population, and poverty and population density have perhaps given us a certain degree of natural immunity. Our predominantly Muslim culture emphasises cleanliness, requiring hand and face washing five times a day for ablution. Our people have lived closely with disaster, and are more aware of their own mortality. We are also fortunate that Covid-19 has not become too much of a political game, and the government is doing what it can with our

limited resources. The will is there. We must build on these positive realities.

Yet we need to rethink and prepare for a new dawn. Things won't be easy but perhaps the lessons we've learnt will help to build a more equitable world where people find time to nurture human values as one of the most important elements of life.

No Business as Usual



Friendship Colours of the Chars' pop-up store at 43 Grand Rue in the centre of Luxembourg city is featuring masks made by marginalized women from the chars and Friendship's community members. The 4 euros you spend on one of these will have a four-fold impact:

- Protect yourself and those you encounter,
- Protect one vulnerable person in Luxembourg with a mask,
- Protect one vulnerable person in Bangladesh with a mask, and

- Assure a respectable income for artisans.

Friendship's Response to Covid-19

- Friendship has provided [968,328 health services](#) since March 8, when the first Covid-19 cases were detected in Bangladesh.
- With a new clinic now in Teknaf, Friendship now has [4 hospitals and 19 clinics](#) operating countrywide.
- Friendship has [416 doctors and medical personnel, and 618 health workers](#) serving hard-to-reach and marginalised communities in different parts of the country.
- Friendship Centre in Gaibandha is being used as [isolation centre](#) for district medical staff.
- Friendship staff and volunteers have reached over [1.64 million people](#) with government and WHO messages on [Covid-19 awareness and hygiene](#).
- Marginalised communities, led by char women trained by Friendship made [72,500 cloth masks](#) with three and four layers of handwoven cotton cut to a Japanese pattern, and are in the process of making another 52,000.
- Friendship enterprise Nodi, employing members of remote communities have also produced [7,300 sanitary napkins, 1,200 coveralls and 500 gowns](#), and are continuing to manufacture and distribute more products.
- [45,577 surgical and N95 masks](#) for medical use have been procured from third parties for use in Friendship health facilities and to support government medical facilities that we are supporting.
- [2,043 sets of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) have been procured for Friendship and government health facilities.



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Friendship

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