



An Update from Operation Smile Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ruben Ayala on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear friends and Operation Smile supporters from around the world,

As the Operation Smile global family, we all believe that every day gives us a chance to serve, aid our communities, offer opportunities for our children and help heal humanity.

Today, we are in the midst of extraordinary times. Grounded in empathy, solidarity and concern for one another, our actions require the utmost measure, thoughtfulness and decisiveness.

The worldwide spread of the new coronavirus that causes the disease known as COVID-19 poses incredible challenges. Safeguarding the health and well-being of all, including everyone involved with Operation Smile, has been at the forefront of our activities. The safety of patients, caregivers, volunteers, staff, supporters and partners in each of our communities around the world has always been, and will continue to be, our top priority.

As new knowledge and evidence has become available from efforts guided by medical experts and top scientists, our senior leadership and our COVID-19 response team have remained watchful. We have constantly monitored the evolution of this disease from the onset, adapting protocols to maximize our ability to offer care while minimizing risks.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. On March 6, 2020, after careful consideration of information produced by international health agencies and consultations with our partners where we work, we decided to suspend all international travel for volunteers who were to serve on Operation Smile programs and activities. This decision currently stands through April 30, 2020, and this period may be extended pending further evaluation of the state of COVID-19 globally.

Understanding that this suspension of travel for international volunteers can impact our ability to deliver patient care, we are working with our in-country volunteer teams to conduct medical programs in areas that have not been directly impacted by COVID-19 in March and April. We are

fortunate that our capable global volunteer force and nearly 40 years of building strong program and surgical capacities at the country level allow us to localize our programs effectively.

We are also fine-tuning strategies to ensure we can amplify our efforts toward our patients once the situation improves.

Finally, we understand that, depending on the situation, different countries may require to direct the talent of our volunteers towards emergent health care related to COVID-19 cases.

As such, all decisions related to medical programs will continue to be made in collaboration with our in-country teams, their local health ministries and other key stakeholders with safety as the top priority.

In the words of WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, “let’s all look out for each other, because we need each other.”

Now, more than ever, we must rely on each other to act with kindness, compassion and empathy.

From our global family to yours, we wish you and everyone in your community the best of health.

[We invite you to refer to the WHO’s website for COVID-19 for further information and guidance.](#)

In health,

Dr. Ruben Ayala
Chief Medical Officer
Operation Smile

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