



STATEMENT FROM OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR ON COVID-19



Dear students, colleagues and other stakeholders

You will all be aware by now of the ongoing outbreak of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that is an escalating global crisis. On Wednesday, March 11, the World Health Organisation (WHO) took the step of declaring it a global pandemic. Whilst the disease has mainly impacted Asia, Europe and North America, there are now cases confirmed within Africa in countries with economic links to Malawi. These include South Africa and the DRC. There is an ever increasing possibility that the virus may be in Malawi soon. On March 7, His Excellency the State President, Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika, appointed a special cabinet committee on Coronavirus which held its first meeting on March 9. In partnership with the WHO, government has developed a COVID-19 Preparedness and Contingency Plan that will give overall guidance and direction on Malawi's response to this threat.

COVID-19 has had a massive impact on all aspects of life where it has been confirmed and universities and colleges have not been spared. It is important that we develop a coordinated, well planned and effective response to the challenges that COVID-19 presents. I would, therefore, like to inform you of some of the steps we are taking in preparation for the impact COVID-19 may have on Malawi and on MUST.

1. Establishment of a COVID-19 Taskforce/Team

I have directed the establishment of a COVID-19 Taskforce. This team will be chaired by Prof Wilson Mandala, ED-AMS, who will represent the Executive Management team, with representation from the Safety, Health, Environment and Utilities Committee (SHEUC) and some additional experts who will be co-opted. This committee's mandate will be to **formulate and coordinate a detailed response and contingency plan for MUST**. We will, of course, be guided by the policy direction and directives coming from the cabinet committee and the National Preparedness and Contingency Plan and we will consult widely with our colleagues in various government ministries and departments as well as sister institutions such as the College of Medicine.

2. Postponement of travel plans and support for staff members in affected countries

I have directed that all plans for travel by members of staff and students be placed on hold for some time until the situation improves. We have also requested that all people planning to come to MUST delay their visits for some time. MUST has members of staff that are being trained in various institutions around the world, including China. These brave academics have been in the epicentre of the crisis and we have remained in contact with them since the crisis began earlier this year. We are making all efforts to support them in dealing with the challenges related to their confinement under the lockdown that was imposed. We are taking steps to provide similar support to our staff members in countries where the pandemic is spreading.

3. Communication and information

I will continue to communicate with the MUST family and provide updates on decisions taken by government and our taskforce/team on all matters related to COVID-19 and the functioning of the university. It is important that useful information is provided to allow us to plan and take the necessary steps to protect all of us. I will post updates on the MUST website and on our social media platforms. We will also provide useful links to reliable sources of data and information. The response plan will have a communication strategy component built in.

Some immediate steps and advice

The severity of the pandemic means that we can expect some significant changes in the way normal business is conducted. I would like to advise staff and students to begin preparing and practising some of the behaviours that have become necessary in the face of this crisis.

1. **Be informed:** In the age of social media, there are many sources of information. Always ensure that the information you are consuming and sharing is from a reliable source. If you are unsure, please be cautious. Use reliable sources of information to make informed decisions about your plans and conduct. Some useful links are provided below:

Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM): <http://malawipublichealth.org>

World Health Organisation (WHO): www.who.int/emergencies/disease/novel-coronavirus-2019

2. **Practise good hygiene:** The most important means of arresting the spread of the disease is by practising sensible hygiene.
 - a. Regular hand washing with soap for at least 20 seconds
 - b. Avoiding touching your eyes, mouth and nose
 - c. Avoiding close contact such as handshakes, hugs and kisses
 - d. Cover your mouth with the bend of your elbow or some tissue when you cough
 - e. Avoid crowded places

3. **Inform others:** Let people know what to do. It is important to be a source of useful and accurate information in this time of fear and confusion. Pay special attention to friends and colleagues who are vulnerable and inform them of the possible heightened risk. This includes persons over the age of 60 and persons with any underlying medical conditions such as HIV, TB, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease etc.
4. **Act responsibly:** If you are concerned that you may have come into contact with Coronavirus or have symptoms such as a cough and a fever, it is recommended that you do NOT go to a clinic. You should rather place a call to a health facility and they will come to test you at home. Put yourself under isolation and make every effort to ensure the health and safety of those family members with whom you share a home.

Emergency contact details:

COVID Toll-free number (Malawi): +265 887 371288

MUST Clinic: +265 888 627283
+265 995 583633
+265 881 768689

Thank you

**Prof Address Malata, PhD, FAAN
Vice Chancellor**