



MILSET COVID-19 UPDATE

As a global organisation, MILSET's top priority is the health and safety of the young scientists, volunteers, visitors and staff participating in its events and programs. MILSET is providing the following information related to the current outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

In the past few days, several organisations have announced the cancellation or postponement of events, based on the global status of the declared COVID-19 pandemic. These measures have been taken to ensure the health of participants and reduce the spread of infection. Some have been the result of government actions, including travel restrictions and border closures.

Many MILSET and MILSET member activities are based on international participation. During 2020, **MILSET Regional ExpoSciences** are scheduled to take place in **Romania, Kazakhstan, Argentina** and the **United Arab Emirates**. Due in part to the different event dates, there are different plans to address the situation from each organising committee:

- **MILSET ExpoSciences Vostok committee**, who will host ESV 2020 in June, has announced that there are currently no cases of sick residents of Kazakhstan by COVID-19. A government decree specifies four categories of countries with identified coronavirus cases:
 - Category 1 "a" (entry closed): People's Republic of China (PRC), Iran, South Korea, Italy.
 - Category 1 "b" (entry closed from March 12): France, Germany, Spain.
 - Category 2 (phone monitoring within 14 days): Switzerland, Great Britain, Netherlands.
 - Category 3 (monitoring of the epidemiological situation, monitoring within 24 hours): Belgium, Sweden, Norway, India, Iraq, Philippines, USA.

The Government of Kazakhstan has organised ongoing medical support for the guests. The final decision on entry and quarantine is planned to be taken on March 31. There is currently no intention of postponing the event and they are ready to receive guests following all safety measures.

- **MILSET ExpoSciences Europe committee**, who will host ESE 2020 in July, announced that there are no cases of COVID-19 in Suceava or Romania.
 - The university where the event will take place is continuously under sanitisation, and the committee will check all participants on arrival. In case someone is found with problems they will have to spend 14 days in isolation in Romania, so they will not be able to participate in the events and they will lose their return ticket.
 - In case of postponement, the decision will be announced in early June
- **MILSET ExpoSciences Latin America committee** will host ESI AMLAT 2020 in November. They are consulting with the Argentinian authorities to develop a plan.
- **MILSET ExpoSciences Asia committee** will host ESA 2020 in November. The committee notes that in the UAE, the situation is almost stable and under control, borders & airports are open, and business is proceeding. The possibilities of postponement or cancellation have not been considered yet.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation is a global matter that is changing every day and could be affected by restrictions in the host and/or participants' countries, such as the current resolution of the USA to restrict the arrival of flights from 26 European countries.



When MILSET programs and events can proceed, it is crucial to minimise the risk for participants and ensure that safe hygiene practices are in place. Recommendations to reduce the risk of coronavirus infection during programs and events include:

- Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using alcohol hand rub containing 60% alcohol at regular intervals, particularly after using public transport, after toileting and before and after handling, serving or eating food.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms, or who appears unwell.
- Stay in your room and notify your group leader if you feel unwell.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, then dispose of the tissue and wash your hands as soon as possible.
- Ensure frequently touched items and surfaces, (e.g., door handles, light switches, taps) are cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Avoid visiting live bird and animal markets, backyard or commercial poultry farms and do not touch wild or domestic birds (alive or dead).
- Avoid any contact with animals, birds or surfaces that may be contaminated with animal or bird droppings.
- Avoid eating or handling undercooked or raw meat, including poultry, egg or duck dishes.
- Avoid sharing personal items.
- Even if a mask is worn, all recommended precautions to minimise the risk of transmission should still be used.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a document that explains in detail the steps to follow to manage COVID-19 risk when organising meetings & events.¹ The primary advice includes:

1. BEFORE the meeting:

- Check the information from the authorities in the community where you plan to hold the meeting or event. Follow their advice.
- Develop and agree on a preparedness plan to prevent infection at your meeting or event.
 - Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a teleconference or online event?
 - Could the meeting or event be scaled down so that fewer people attend?
 - Ensure and verify information and communication channels in advance with key partners such as public health and health care authorities.
 - Pre-order enough supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitiser for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.
 - Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
 - Make sure all organisers, participants, caterers and visitors at the event provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying. State clearly that their details will be shared with local public health authorities if any participant becomes ill with suspected infectious disease. If they do not agree with this, they cannot attend the event or meeting.
- Develop and agree with a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (dry cough, fever, malaise). This plan should include at least:
 - Identify a room or area where someone who is feeling unwell or has symptoms can be safely isolated

¹ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6



- Have a plan for how they can be safely transferred from there to a health facility.
- Know what to do if a meeting participant, staff member or service provider tests positive for COVID-19 during or just after the meeting
- Agree on the plan in advance with your partner healthcare provider or health department.

2. DURING the meeting:

- Provide information or a briefing, preferably both orally and in writing, on COVID-19 and the measures that organisers are taking to make this event safe for participants.
 - Build trust. For example, as an icebreaker, practice ways to say hello without touching.
 - Encourage regular hand-washing or use of an alcohol rub by all participants at the meeting or event
 - Encourage participants to cover their face with the bend of their elbow or tissue if they cough or sneeze. Supply tissues and closed bins to dispose of them in.
 - Provide contact details or a health redline number that participants can call for advice or give information.
- Display dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub prominently around the venue.
- If there is space, arrange seats so that participants are at least one meter apart.
- Open windows and doors whenever possible to make sure the venue is well ventilated.
- If anyone starts to feel unwell, follow your preparedness plan or call your hotline.
 - Depending on the situation in your area, or recent travel of the participant, place the person in the isolation room. Offer the person a mask so they can get home safely, if appropriate, or to a designated assessment facility.
- Thank all participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

3. AFTER the meeting

Retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. It will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill shortly after the event.

- If someone at the meeting or event was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, the organiser should let all participants know this. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.
- If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e., a temperature of 37.3 C or more) they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (1 meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their healthcare provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.
- Thank all the participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

Finally, it is essential to stay informed through official media and health authorities about any update to the COVID-19 status; we strongly recommend the following:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

The safety and security of all our participants, organisers, volunteers and members **must be our highest priority.**