

# Report helps develop WHO guidelines for COVID-19

March 30 2020, by Shelley Hughes

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The World Health Organisation's (WHO's) new ethical guidelines for research on COVID-19 have been developed using a report co-authored by an expert from the University of York.

The WHO guidelines, which outline key universal ethical standards

which should be adhered to by researchers during the COVID-19 outbreak, have been issued to all its 194 member states. The guidelines list the the Nuffield Council on Bioethics Report of Research during Global Health Emergencies, by a team of international researchers and institutions, including the University of York, as a key document.

## **Conducting ethical research**

The report, published in January 2020, outlined how researchers, governments and organizations can take a more ethical and collaborative approach to conducting research during infectious disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

The University of York's member of the working group, Professor Sanjoy Bhattacharya, Head of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Global Health Histories, based within the Department of History, said: "Our report set out a new way for the [international community](#) to work together ethically and transparently in the event of a [health](#) emergency, for the equal benefit of people around the world.

"Historical experience shows that in the event of a disease outbreak, those involved in health research systems have not always acted in a way that considers a [local population](#) and their culture, society and needs."

## **Distressing circumstances**

The report acknowledges how the pressures and distressing circumstances of health emergencies can lead to uncertainty about what is ethically acceptable in research. The experts warn that valuable research can be impeded, or unethical practices can creep in.

The Nuffield Council's initial call for action, which has been translated

into multiple languages, highlights a number of proposals including:

- More investment in community engagement so that local voices can be heard, and that everyone involved in research in global health emergencies is treated fairly and respectfully.
- Ensuring that, before proceeding with any research project, participants' basic health needs are being addressed. Funders will need to work in partnerships with humanitarian organizations and health ministries to achieve this.
- Better support for emergency planning, to secure robust health and health research systems—given the vital importance of properly resourced preparedness between emergencies.

The recommendations in the report are based on three [core values](#): fairness, equal respect and helping to reduce suffering. The report presents these values in the form of an 'ethical compass' to guide the conduct of the wide range of people involved in research in global health emergencies.

**More information:** Research in global health emergencies:  
[www.nuffieldbioethics.org/publications/1-health-emergencies](http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/publications/1-health-emergencies)

Provided by University of York

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