



9th March 2020

“We face two epidemics, one of disease the other of fear of that disease. Both threaten our health.” - David Ropeik, retired Harvard Instructor on Risk Communication

As of Sunday, March 8th the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that over 100 countries have now reported laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19. Within Massachusetts, there have been 28 positive test results for COVID-19, according to the Department of Public Health.

A lack of knowledge regarding coronavirus and its transmission has caused fear and anxiety across the globe. The number of people affected by the virus is on the rise, as are racism and xenophobia associated with the issue, particularly towards those with Asian heritage. In light of the recent attack of an Asian student in London, it is important to understand that this virus, like any virus, can be carried and transmitted by any human of any race.

“Help stop fear by letting people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.” - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Harvard Graduate Council (HGC) requests the student body, administration and faculty at all 12 schools of Harvard, in solidarity with persons affected by coronavirus, to be mindful of inappropriate remarks and jokes centering around COVID-19. We the HGC urge the Harvard community to refrain from any xenophobic remarks about students, specifically students of Asian descent. We also urge the university to recognize the financial and mental health anxiety the disease is causing and act by providing adequate resources and academic/work flexibility to students and staff.

“Let’s meet this challenge together in the best spirit of compassion for others, patience, and above all, an unfailing effort to seek truth, facts and knowledge as opposed to conjecture, speculation and catastrophizing.” - Dr. Abdu Sharkawy, Infectious Diseases specialist, University of Toronto

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