



AN UPDATE FROM OPERATION SMILE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER DR. RUBEN AYALA ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

April 1, 2020

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.

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 May 31, 2020, and this period may be extended pending further evaluation of the state of COVID-19 globally.

For the time being, all programs including medical missions, education and training, and public activities in Operation Smile program countries have been temporarily paused. This includes Operation Smile's year-round care centers. We are taking a case-by-case approach in consultation with our in-country executives and anticipate further cancellations and postponements through April, May and June.

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

Finally, we understand that, in many countries, the talent of our volunteers is being directed toward emergent health care for people affected by COVID-19. We thank these heroes for their selfless and courageous service.

Around the world, we are also redirecting essential supplies and equipment, continuing nutritional support efforts where possible, and working with a multitude of partners and ministries of health to assist in this unprecedented time of need. In the spirit of solidarity, we're working hard to find the most meaningful ways that we can to support the health needs of the communities in which we work.

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