

Key Messaging: Protecting Her Right to Decide During Covid-19

This document contains SheDecides' key messaging on Covid-19 and its impact on her right to decide. Its aim is to create a **unified voice on bodily autonomy in the context of Covid-19** and can be used as a resource by the SheDecides movement, including the Local Movements, Champions, the 25x25 network, SheDecides Partners and Friends.

As a movement SheDecides is deeply concerned about the implications that the spread of Covid-19 is having on women and girls and their right to decide about their bodies, lives and futures. Lessons learned from past public health emergencies and recent analysis, show that the Covid-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting women and girls, exacerbating existing inequalities and discrimination in a number of ways, including adverse effects on their sexual health and rights.

The short-term implications of this global challenge on the lives of women and girls are becoming increasingly evident as the restrictions imposed to contain the outbreak have resulted in additional restrictions to life-saving healthcare, services and commodities.

Overloaded health systems, reallocation of funding and resources, shortages of medical supplies, disruptions to global supply chains and travel restrictions will adversely affect women as they may face barriers in accessing contraceptives, safe abortion services, antiretroviral medication, and other reproductive healthcare services. Emerging data has also shown that since the outbreak of Covid-19 violence against women and girls has intensified, with social isolation forcing many to stay home and remain in abusive environments with barriers in accessing survivor support services.

Even after the outbreak has been contained, there will be long term implications for women and girls and their right to decide. While funding, researchers and healthcare workers are being diverted to work on Covid-19, it is important that essential sexual and reproductive health services remain available, respecting her rights to make the decisions only she should make.

The SheDecides movement is united, standing together to ensure her right to decide is prioritised and protected. **Now more than ever we must come together and defend her right to decide over her body, her life and her future.**

Below are some key messages on Covid-19 and its impact on her right to decide in relation to SheDecides vision - a world where SheDecides about her body, life and future. Without question.

The impact of Covid-19 on bodily autonomy and her right to decide

- Measures put in place to slow the spread of the virus mean essential services, such as sexual health clinics, abortion providers, and domestic violence services are inaccessible, restricting access to essential services, contraceptives and information, limiting her right to decide about her body, life and future
- The response to Covid-19 must not weaken efforts to create a world where SheDecides.
- Sexual and reproductive health services that protect her right to decide must be recognised as essential services.

Standing up and speaking out

- In order to create a world where every girl and woman can decide what happens to her body we must stand up, speak out and publicly express support for policies and laws that protect her right to decide in the response to Covid-19.
- Effectively tackling the impact of Covid-19 requires concerted action to ensure that human rights commitments – including the right to reproductive health and services – are prioritized in the response.

Changing the rules

- Her right to decide must be central to the laws and policies that respond to Covid-19. We will hold governments accountable for implementing laws and policies that protect and prioritise her right to decide during this time.

Unlocking resources

- During periods of crisis, women's rights need to be maintained and prioritised. The diversion of current funding risks the loss of hard-won gains for bodily autonomy and choice that have been made over the past decades. Millions of women and girls across the world will face threats to health, dignity and life without it. Every government must ensure funding allocated for the protection of women's bodily autonomy is preserved.

Pushing Back against the Push Back

- We must ensure that those exploiting the pandemic to enact regressive policies do not succeed in limiting her right to decide over her body, her life and her future.