New York City is America’s ultimate melting pot. You can’t go a city block without sharing the sidewalk with people of every color.

But these days, being in the city of Lady Liberty feels not just unwelcoming, but scary, particularly if you happen to be Asian. Because of the linkage of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, to China, the disease has become associated with East Asians of any type, regardless of whether you have even the faintest possibility of being infected.

This is sad and troubling for the Asian American community. As the founder of the Asian American Business Development Center, which has made New York City our home for over two decades, I share these feelings of being targeted and unfairly blamed.

The coronavirus, as other diseases like Ebola, Zika, or H1N1, has shown little discretion about someone’s race, beliefs, status. Senior government leaders, Hollywood stars, athletes have joined the growing list of those testing positive for the illness. For ordinary Asian Americans trying to continue living their normal lives, ignorance about the coronavirus is proving to be as potent as the illness itself.

Personal health concerns are morphing into ugly racism. Asians who wear masks are castigated for depriving medical workers of masks during the supply shortage. Asians who don’t wear masks are treated like lepers and suspicion.

We’ve heard numerous stories of Asian Americans being physically assaulted and aggressively questioned by complete strangers about their origins and potential links to the virus. Public transport has become fraught with uncomfortable situations, including having commuters move away from Asian Americans or at the least, eye them with open hostility.

This is not the America I know and love. I appeal to all people to not allow this pandemic - which after all has swept across all regions, irrespective of race - to stigmatize and criminalize a segment of our community.

We hope businesses, diversity organizations and corporate leaders will take a stand to promote facts about the coronavirus, and to be vigilant about protecting their vulnerable workforce members from unjustified harassment and suspicion.

We know that America is greater and bigger than this crisis. I believe we will get through this storm, but I hope that it will be together, as a civil society that cares for all of its members. Please take a stand with us against harassment and racism. We would appreciate you sharing this post with your network.

John Wang
Guidelines for Corporate Managers and Employees to Support the Asian American Community

Recommendations from the Asian American Business Development Center

Purpose: The Asian American Business Development Center (AABDC) has compiled a list of recommended dos and donts for corporations, their managers and employees who wish to demonstrate support to their Asian American colleagues, partners, customers and the community during the Covid-19 “Coronavirus” pandemic.

The coronavirus crisis has been the trigger for a rise in harassment, hostility and racism against some Asian Americans, particularly those of East Asian origin. There have been numerous reports and accounts from Asian Americans who have been unfairly targeted for no other reason than their physical appearance.

Dos

- Realize that the virus’ link to China has led to stigmatization of not only those who come from China, but anyone who “looks” Chinese.
- Remember that the coronavirus, just as many previous pandemics like SARS and H1N1, has been indiscriminate in spreading across boundaries.
- Be sensitive that the Asia Pacific region has a large and diverse cultural base, and that each nationality is distinct and shares its own unique identity.
- Be aware that your East Asian American employees, customers and partners may be feeling particularly sensitive about being connected with the origins of the virus from China.
- Be mindful of comments, even meant in humor, that use stereotypical language to describe or discuss the virus and the connection with China, can be extremely hurtful.
- Tell your managers and employees that these challenging times require extra care and sensitivity during interactions with each other.
- Maintain an open door policy for all your employees and managers to raise any issues relating to virus-related racism or harassment.
- Ask managers to be vigilant to observe for any signs of targeting or stigmatizing. Some of these interactions may be subtle and those who are targeted may be reluctant to speak up.
- Share this and any other materials that discuss this issue and join other companies and organizations to speak up against this virus-linked racism.