



## **COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **What is a coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

#### **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

#### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell. Most people (about 80 per cent) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around one out of every six people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. About two per cent of people with the disease have died. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

#### **How does COVID-19 spread?**

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than one meter away from a person who is sick.

## **Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be transmitted through the air?**

Studies to date suggest that the virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets rather than through the air.

## **Can COVID-19 be caught from a person who has no symptoms?**

The main way the disease spreads is through respiratory droplets expelled by someone who is coughing. The risk of catching COVID-19 from someone with no symptoms at all is very low. However, many people with COVID-19 experience only mild symptoms. This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is therefore possible to catch COVID-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill.

## **Can I catch COVID-19 from the faeces of someone with the disease?**

The risk of catching COVID-19 from the faeces of an infected person appears to be low. While initial investigations suggest the virus may be present in faeces in some cases, spread through this route is not a main feature of the outbreak. Because this is a risk, however, it is another reason to clean hands regularly, after using the bathroom and before eating.

## **What can I do to protect myself and prevent the spread of disease?**

### **Protection measures for everyone**

Stay aware of the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak, available on the websites and social media of the national Department of Health ([www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za)), National Institute for Communicable Diseases ([www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za)) and World Health Organization ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)).

Most people who become infected will experience mild illness and recover, but it can be more severe for others. Take care of your health and protect others by doing the following:

- Regularly and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitiser kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least one meter distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Why? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain a virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used

tissue immediately. Why? Droplets spread viruses. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health facility. Why? The national and provincial Departments of Health will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your healthcare provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider and the national Department of Health on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Why? National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on whether COVID-19 is spreading in your area. They are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

### **Protection measures for persons who are in or have recently visited (past 14 days) areas where COVID-19 is spreading**

- Stay at home if you begin to feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as headache and slight runny nose, until you recover. Why? Avoiding contact with others and visits to medical facilities will allow these facilities to operate more effectively and help protect you and others from possible COVID-19 and other viruses.
- If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call in advance and tell your provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers. Why? Calling in advance will allow your healthcare provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also help to prevent possible spread of COVID-19 and other viruses.

### **How likely am I to catch COVID-19?**

The risk depends on where you are - and more specifically, whether there is a COVID-19 outbreak unfolding there.

There are now places around South Africa where the disease is spreading. For people living in, or visiting, these areas the risk of catching COVID-19 is higher. The governments and health authorities are taking vigorous action every time a new case of COVID-19 is identified. Be sure to comply with the current lockdown in South Africa. Cooperating with disease control efforts will reduce your risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.

COVID-19 outbreaks can be contained and transmission stopped, as has been shown in China and some other countries. Unfortunately, new outbreaks can emerge rapidly. It's important to be aware of the situation where you are or intend to go.

### **Should I worry about COVID-19?**

Illness due to COVID-19 infection is generally mild, especially for children and young adults. However, it can cause serious illness: about 1 in every 5 people who catch it need hospital care. It is therefore quite normal for people to worry about how the COVID-19 outbreak will affect them and their loved ones.

We can channel our concerns into actions to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. First and foremost among these actions is regular and thorough hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene. Secondly, keep informed and follow the advice of the local health authorities including any restrictions put in place in terms of the lockdown.

### **Who is at risk of developing severe illness?**

While we are still learning about how COVID-2019 affects people, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

### **Are antibiotics effective in preventing or treating the COVID-19?**

No. Antibiotics do not work against viruses, they only work on bacterial infections. COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so antibiotics do not work. Antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment of COVID-19. They should only be used as directed by a physician to treat a bacterial infection.

### **Is there a vaccine, drug or treatment for COVID-19?**

Not yet. To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-2019. However, those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. People with serious illness should be hospitalised. Most patients recover thanks to supportive care.

Possible vaccines and some specific drug treatments are under investigation. They are being tested through clinical trials. The World Health Organization (WHO) is coordinating efforts to develop vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat COVID-19.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue, and maintain a distance of at least one meter from people who are coughing or sneezing.

### **Should I wear a mask to protect myself?**

Only wear a mask if you are ill with COVID-19 symptoms (especially coughing) or looking after someone who may have COVID-19. Disposable face mask can only be used once. If you are not ill or looking after someone

who is ill then you are wasting a mask. There is a world-wide shortage of masks, so the World Health Organization (WHO) urges people to use masks wisely.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from people who are coughing or sneezing.

### **How to put on, use, take off and dispose of a mask?**

1. Remember, a mask should only be used by health workers, care takers, and individuals with respiratory symptoms, such as fever and cough.
2. Before touching the mask, clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
3. Take the mask and inspect it for tears or holes.
4. Orient which side is the top side (where the metal strip is).
5. Ensure the proper side of the mask faces outwards (the coloured side).
6. Place the mask to your face. Pinch the metal strip or stiff edge of the mask so it moulds to the shape of your nose.
7. Pull down the mask's bottom so it covers your mouth and your chin.
8. After use, take off the mask; remove the elastic loops from behind the ears while keeping the mask away from your face and clothes, to avoid touching potentially contaminated surfaces of the mask.
9. Discard the mask in a closed bin immediately after use.
10. Perform hand hygiene after touching or discarding the mask – Use alcohol-based hand rub or, if visibly soiled, wash your hands with soap and water.

### **How long is the incubation period for COVID-19?**

The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days.

### **How long does the virus survive on surfaces?**

It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

### **Is it safe to receive a package from any area where COVID-19 has been reported?**

Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also low.

### **Is there anything I should not do?**

The following measures **ARE NOT** effective against COVID-2019 and can be harmful:

- smoking
- wearing multiple masks
- taking self-medication such as antibiotics

**In any case, if you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early** to reduce the risk of developing a more severe infection and be sure to share your recent travel history with your healthcare provider.

### **Is COVID-19 airborne?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks. **These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces.**

You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within 1 metre of a person who has COVID-19, or by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

**Call the COVID-19 Hotline: 0800 029 999**

**Send “hi” on WhatsApp to COVID-19 Connect: 060 012 3456**

**Visit the website [www.sacoronavirus.co.za](http://www.sacoronavirus.co.za)**