

16 March 2020

## CORONAVIRUS (COVID – 19) Q&A

### **Q: What are coronaviruses?**

A: 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 illness among humans and is known as COVID-19.

### **Q: How is COVID-19 transmitted?**

A: 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. Therefore, it is important to stay more than 1 metre away from a person who is sick.

### **Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19 infection?**

A: The symptoms of COVID-19 infection are fever, dry cough and shortness of breath. Some people 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 don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 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.

### **Q: If I suspect that I am infected with COVID-19, what should I do?**

People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical advice. The first step is to call the National Institute for Communicable Diseases hotline on 0800 299 99, where you will get advice about what to do.

### **Q: How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

A: Throat swabs and sputum obtained from one's respiratory tract are needed. A molecular test will be done to identify the genetic material of the virus. This test will only be positive if the person has the active disease. There is a 24-hour turn-around time for the results. At present, individuals that do not have symptoms that are linked to COVID-19 infection are not being tested.

## Simple ways to reduce your chances of being infected with or spreading COVID-19

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water, as this kills the virus that may be on your hands.

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

Maintain at least 1 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

Other hygiene practices, such as avoiding spitting in public, should be followed.

In order to prevent the seasonal flu (not COVID-19), the flu vaccine will be available.

Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. 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.

Clean surfaces at work such as desks, telephones, and keyboards and surfaces at home with normal household disinfectants such as Handy Andy or Dettol.

If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection.

Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call the NICD hotline at **0800 029 999** or Department of Health's WhatsApp platform (Text "HI" to **0600 123 456**) in advance. Follow the directions given, as they will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

### **Q: When should I use a mask?**

A: 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 WHO urges people to use masks wisely.

WHO advises rational use of medical masks to avoid unnecessary wastage of precious resources and mis-use of masks. For more information, visit the World Health Organisation's website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

**Q: Can COVID-19 be transmitted via food?**

A: It is unlikely that the virus can be passed through food and there is no evidence yet of COVID-19 that suggest that people can be infected with the virus through food. Coronaviruses need a host (animal or human) to grow in thus cannot grow in food.

Practice general food safety:

- People who are ill should not be preparing food.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Use different chopping boards and knives for raw meat and cooked foods to avoid cross contamination.
- Sick animals and animals that have died of diseases should not be eaten.

**Q: How do I keep up to date on COVID-19?**

A: Daily updates are available on the NICD; DOH & WHO websites:

[www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za)

[www.ndoh.gov.za](http://www.ndoh.gov.za)

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

Sources of information used to develop this Q&A:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>