



Dr Ben is Head of Health and Care with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). With this weekly fact sheet he will address some of the most common questions and rumours being asked by communities across Africa about the coronavirus, known as COVID-19. These questions and rumours are collected from communities by Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies working across Africa. This fact sheet aims to help National Societies respond to common questions and provide the facts behind the rumours and misinformation about the coronavirus.

1. Can people in Africa catch the coronavirus?

- Yes, unfortunately we can all catch coronavirus, men and women, young and old, no matter where we come from or what race we are
- The coronavirus comes from the same family of viruses as the cold or flu, so just as anyone can catch a cold, they can also catch coronavirus
- The virus has now spread to 196 countries around the world, and people from all continents have been affected, including Africans, Asians, Americans and Europeans.
- The first case of coronavirus in Kenya was a 27-year old African lady who had flown home from the USA via London to Kenya
- The first death in Zimbabwe due to coronavirus was a 30-year old African man who had recently returned to his home in Zimbabwe after visiting a country with coronavirus cases
- Although everyone can catch and spread coronavirus to others, elderly people or those with existing illnesses, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, are more at risk as they seem to get more ill from the virus
- So no matter where you come from, it is important that you follow the five simple rules below to keep yourself and your family safe – particularly your older relatives or those with existing illnesses.

THE 5 SIMPLE RULES TO KEEP YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY SAFE

1. Always wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Proper hand washing should take around 20 seconds and cover all parts of your hands – fingers, thumbs, between fingers, under nails, palms and the back of your hands. Sing the happy birthday song twice while you wash your hands to time 20 seconds. This will kill any viruses that are on your hands
2. Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth – this increases the chance of passing the virus from your hands into your body
3. The virus spreads from person to person so try to limit your contact with other people. Stay home and avoid bars, restaurants and public events. If you do out, try to keep a safe distance from others. Imagine you are holding a big broom - you are a safe distance if you can't touch anyone with it. Avoid shaking hands, holding hands, kisses on the cheeks or hugs.
4. If you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow – and wash your hands if you do cough or sneeze into your hands
5. Stay at home if you feel unwell and have a dry cough and fever and contact your local health services or Ministry of Health hotline. This reduces the chance you might spread the virus to others.

2. Is coronavirus a man-made disease?

- Coronavirus is not a man-made disease.
- Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause different illnesses from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) which caused an outbreak in 2012 and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) which caused an outbreak in 2002/2003.
- Coronaviruses are known to jump from animals to humans and it is believed that the disease began when workers at a seafood market in Wuhan, got this disease from the animals they were in contact with.
- Nature is always producing new viruses and unfortunately this coronavirus is just another example of how clever nature can be.

3. Does garlic cure or prevent coronavirus?

- Garlic is a healthy food and has many benefits for you, but there is no evidence it will cure or prevent coronavirus
- Although, there is currently no cure or vaccine for Coronavirus, it can be prevented and for most people the symptoms are not severe.
- Scientists are working on a vaccine and cure for coronavirus but developing these takes time so while we wait the best thing you can do is follow the five simple rules (see page 1) to keep yourself and your family safe – particularly your older relatives or those with existing illnesses.

4. Does hot water with salt prevent coronavirus?

- Washing yourself in saltwater or drinking hot water with salt will not prevent coronavirus. This is because your body temperature does not change after you wash with or drink hot water and so this will not actually kill the virus.
- Drinking lots of water cannot wash away the virus because by the time you are infected, millions of virus particles will have already entered your system.
- The best way to prevent coronavirus is follow the five simple rules (see page 1) to keep yourself and your family safe – particularly your older relatives or those with existing illnesses.