



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. Is there a cure for COVID-19?

- There is no specific medicine to prevent or treat coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- Scientists are working hard to develop effective treatments. For example, they are investigating whether treatments used for other diseases could also work against COVID-19 but so far, the results are still not clear.
- These treatments will be tested through clinical trials, but so far there is no scientific evidence for a treatment to effectively cure COVID-19.
- If you have mild symptoms, stay at home until you have recovered. You can relieve your symptoms if you:
 - rest and sleep
 - keep warm
 - drink plenty of liquids
 - take a hot shower to help ease a sore throat and cough
- If you suspect that you have COVID-19, you need to stay at home and not mix with other people, even your own family. Make sure you are not sharing any plates and cutlery, sheets or other items with people in your household.
- If you develop a fever, cough, and have difficulty breathing, you should get medical advice. Call your Ministry of Health hotline or local health centre in advance and follow their instructions.

2. Is it only old people that are affected?

- It is true that older people are at higher risk of getting severely sick from COVID-19.
- Older people don't have as strong an immune system as most younger people, and are more likely to have diseases associated with severe COVID outcomes, such as diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. As a result, they are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. They are more likely to have more severe symptoms from COVID-19 and can have more serious complications.
- Age is not the only risk for severe disease, though. Severe cases of the disease have been seen in people in their teens or twenties, with many requiring intensive care and some unfortunately passing away.
- People with a weak immune system or with pre-existing conditions are more vulnerable to COVID-19, no matter their age.
- Everyone can catch coronavirus, young and old, rich and poor, no matter where you come from, where you live or which religion you follow. 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.

- People can spread COVID-19 to vulnerable groups even if they have no or mild symptoms, that is why we all need to take responsibility. It is up to all of us to protect to the most vulnerable amongst our family and friends.
- So, no matter who you are, it is important that you follow the five simple rules on page one 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 and stop them getting into your body.
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 go 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, or shortness of breath and contact your local health services or Ministry of Health hotline. This reduces the chance you might spread the virus to others.

3. Is COVID-19 spread intentionally in Africa?

- Coronavirus is not spread intentionally in Africa. While most countries began seeing cases after people with the virus entered the country through international travel, it is now spreading within communities from person to person.
- The virus spreads when someone who is infected with the virus coughs, sneezes or talks, and the droplets they release from their nose or mouth, get into the eyes, nose or mouth of a healthy person.
- The virus has so far spread in at least 185 countries, with more than 1.8 confirmed infections. Compared to other regions, Africa has seen less confirmed cases so far. Countries currently most severely hit are the United States of America, Spain, Italy and Germany.
- The outbreak of the disease started in China in December 2019, and spread to other countries in Asia, Europe, Australia and the US in January. End of January the outbreak was declared a global emergency. The first country in Africa to report a case was Egypt, on 14 February 2020. To date 52 African countries have reported cases.
- 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/China 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.

4. Is COVID transmitted through sexual intercourse?

- The disease spreads when someone who is infected with the virus coughs, sneezes or talks, and the droplets they release from their nose or mouth, get into the eyes, nose or mouth of a healthy person.
- The virus can therefore be transmitted by kissing, as the virus is transmitted via droplets which may be present in saliva.
- Kissing is a very common practice during sexual intercourse. Having sex with others that includes intimate touching and kissing, puts you at risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.
- If you live in the same household with a regular sexual partner and you don't have any symptoms and exposure to other people, sex can be safe and actually a way to stay connected and relieve anxiety during this potentially stressful time.
- However, if you or your partner exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or generally feel unwell, it is advised that you avoid any physical contact and do not have any physical contact for 14 days-keeping a safe distance of 2m from one another. This means no sex, no intimate touching, and certainly no kissing.
- The best way to prevent yourself and your loved ones from getting coronavirus is to follow the 5 simple rules on page one.

5. Why isn't everyone tested?

- Currently there aren't enough tests to meet demand. Tests are given to patients when the result would make a difference in their care. For example, if the person is a healthcare worker and so coming into contact with others, or they are elderly or have an existing illness so are more likely to become severely ill with the virus, or if they are a known contact of an already confirmed case.
- Decisions about testing are made by national and local health departments and/or individual clinicians.
- There are different tests that are being conducted:
 - One test is done by taking a swab of the nose or throat, which is sent off to a lab to look for signs of the virus.-
 - The other type of test is a blood test to see if someone has already had the virus and signs of it can be seen in the blood.
- So far 47 out of the 49 countries of the IFRC Africa region have the ability to carry out tests for COVID-19, but that is often limited to the capital or other major cities.
- Efforts are ongoing to expand testing in African countries.

IF THERE ARE QUESTIONS OR RUMOURS SPREADING IN YOUR COUNTRY CONTACT EVA.ERLACH@IFRC.ORG AND WE CAN TRY TO ADDRESS THEM IN THIS FACT SHEET.