



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. Does heat kill the virus?

- Coronavirus can be transmitted in any climate, including in hot and humid countries.
- To date, 210 countries and territories across all continents of the world have confirmed cases of coronavirus.
- Countries with a high average temperature such as Saudi Arabia, Cameroon or Ghana have confirmed a high number of cases. This shows that coronavirus can exist and spread in any climate.
- Using heaters, hairdryers or sitting in the sun will not cure you of the virus. The heat needed to kill the virus on surfaces would burn your skin rather than protect you.
- By the time you are infected, millions of virus particles will have already entered your system and there is no way to kill the virus inside your body with heat.
- Washing with or drinking hot water will not prevent coronavirus either. 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.
- The best way to prevent coronavirus is to follow the five simple rules 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.

2. Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

- There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19.
- A lot of work is being done by scientists to find a vaccine and cure for coronavirus but developing these is complicated. The vaccines and cures have to be thoroughly tested to make sure they are safe before they can be given to humans. This takes a long time.
- There is no recorded or published information that vaccines have been given to or tested on humans to date.
- The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement does not take part in the testing of vaccines and the volunteers have not been vaccinated.
- If you or your family have coronavirus symptoms, like a fever and dry cough or difficulty breathing, you should call your Ministry of Health hotline, a local hospital or doctor to ask for advice.
- As the development of vaccines and cures takes a long time, 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.

3. Can traditional herbs cure COVID-19?

- There is currently no cure for coronavirus.
- Many herbs and traditional medicines are claimed to cure or prevent coronavirus, but none of them have been shown to work and have not been approved by medical professionals.
- If you get sick, some herbs or traditional medicines might help ease the symptoms of coronavirus, like a sore throat or cough, but they will not prevent or cure the disease.
- If you or your family have coronavirus symptoms, like a fever and dry cough or difficulty breathing, you should call your Ministry of Health hotline, a local hospital or doctor to ask for advice. It is important that you follow that advice because it is based on what doctors and hospitals have found to work against coronavirus.
- Remember prevention is always better than cure, so the best thing you can do is follow the five simple rules (see page 1) to keep yourself and your family safe

4. Does everyone who has the disease die?

- Not everyone who gets infected with coronavirus will die.
- According to WHO and based on the latest information, 80% of people who catch coronavirus will have mild or no symptoms at all, 15% will have more severe symptoms and around 5% might need specialist hospital care.
- It is hard to say how many people on average die from coronavirus because we don't know exactly how many people have caught the virus. Based on the information WHO have, they estimate between 1 and 4% of confirmed cases of coronavirus have died. However as there are probably lots of people who have caught the disease but not been tested the death rate may be lower than this.
- Although everyone can catch and spread coronavirus to others, elderly people or those with existing illnesses, such as tuberculosis, HIV or malnutrition, are more at risk as they seem to get more ill from the virus.
- If you or your family have coronavirus symptoms, like a fever and dry cough or difficulty breathing, you should immediately call your Ministry of Health hotline, a local hospital or doctor to ask for advice. If you are found to have coronavirus, you must follow the advice given to you by the doctor so that the symptoms do not get worse.

5. Can COVID-19 be transmitted via objects?

- Coronavirus 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. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces.
- You can catch the coronavirus through these droplets in two ways:
 - When a person who has the virus sneezes or coughs next to you and is less than one metre away from you.
 - When the droplets land on surfaces like a table, bottle or bank notes, either because someone sneezes or coughs on them, or sneezes on their hand and touches the surface. You then touch the surface and then touch your own eyes, nose or mouth without washing your hands.
- This is why it is so important to keep a safe distance from people; you may have heard this referred to as 'social distancing'.
- Coronavirus can survive on surfaces anywhere from a few hours to several days depending on different conditions e.g. the type of surface. Surfaces should therefore be cleaned using disinfectants to kill the viruses and to protect yourself and your family. And wash your hands frequently with soap and water so you keep your hands clean of the virus.
- It is also important to make sure that you do not share utensils, drinking glasses, bottles or towels with other people unless they have been thoroughly washed with soap and water between when the other person uses them and when you use them.
- The best way to prevent yourself and your loved ones from getting coronavirus is to follow the 5 simple rules on page one.

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.