



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. What is physical distancing?

- Physical distancing (also referred to as social distancing) refers to maintaining a safe distance between people to reduce the spread of the virus. When people who are infected with the virus stay away from others, they can't pass it to anyone else.
- This is because 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 who is close by.
- Practising physical distancing means trying to stay 2 meters away from others, which is about the arm span of an average adult (if you stand with both arms outstretched, the length from one fingertip to the other fingertip is your arm span). In practice, this means;
 - Don't go out unless it is necessary. Necessary reasons to go out include buying food, getting medical care, or going for a walk alone or with members of the household.
 - Avoiding busy places like schools, restaurants, shops, churches and mosques. In many countries these have already been closed by the Government.
 - Not getting together in person with friends or family who are not already living in the same household.
 - Working from home if possible.
 - Not taking public transport.
 - Avoid typical physical greetings, such as handshakes, kisses on the cheeks or hugs. Do not touch others, even if socially expected. Practice new ways to greet people without touching, for example by bumping elbows or a slight bow.
- If we follow these measures, then we reduce the risk of catching the virus, or passing it on to others.

2. How long will the outbreak last?

- Unfortunately, nobody knows exactly how long the coronavirus outbreak will last.
- Past pandemics have typically lasted from one to three years. For example, the swine flu pandemic in 2009 lasted just over one year according to the US Centres for Disease Control.
- How long this coronavirus pandemic lasts depends on several factors:
 1. **Our behaviour** - Most importantly, it depends on the actions of people and communities. The virus spreads from person to person so if people follow the prevention measures like regular hand washing with soap and water, limiting their contact with others, and staying home and isolating if they think they might have the virus, then the outbreak will end much sooner. If people do not follow these measures, it will keep spreading and infect more and more people and take much longer to end.

2. **The development of a vaccine** - Once a vaccine has been developed and tested and is widely available it can protect people from catching the virus and spreading it to others. However, developing a vaccine takes a long time as it needs to be thoroughly tested to make sure they are safe before they can be given to humans.
 3. **Widespread testing** – leads to the quick identification of cases, quick treatment for people who test positive and immediate isolation to prevent them spreading it to other people. Early testing also helps to identify anyone who came into contact with infected people so they too can be quickly treated and isolated too.
- Therefore, help us to end the coronavirus outbreak by following the five simple rules below.

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, cheek kisses 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. Does lifting of lockdowns mean that the outbreak is over or that there is a cure?

- No unfortunately not.
- Governments across Africa know that for many people lockdowns cannot continue for too long as people also need to earn an income to feed their families and pay their rent. The Government must balance the need to slow the spread of coronavirus with people's other important needs, like reopening shops and businesses and going to work or school.
- Governments will often start to ease the restrictions on people's movement once cases start to reduce and when other prevention measures are in place, like widespread testing so that people who test positive for the virus can be isolated, or when people get used to physical distancing and practicing good hygiene.
- Unfortunately, there is still no vaccine or cure for coronavirus, which is why it is very important to follow the five simple rules on page one to keep yourself and your family safe.
- This is even more important if you live in a country where lock downs and restrictions are being reduced as this is when people might relax and forget to follow key prevention measures like hand washing and not touching your face. If people are not careful, this can lead to an increase in new cases of coronavirus, which might mean the government has to bring back lock downs and restrictions.

- A lot of work is being done by scientists to find a vaccine and cure for coronavirus but developing these are complicated and takes a long time. So, for now and always, prevention is better than cure.

4. Why don't we see sick people in the media?

- More than 42,000 people in Africa and almost four million globally, have tested positive for the coronavirus, according to WHO's situation report released on the 10 May 2020.
- When someone is ill with coronavirus, it is important they are not in contact with others as this is how the virus spreads to other people – this includes being in contact with journalists. So, it would not be a good idea for journalists to be in close contact with people who are sick with coronavirus.
- It is also everyone's individual choice whether they want to have their story told in the media and forcing people who have coronavirus to be exposed in the media could lead to people hiding it when they are sick and refusing to be tested, which would only cause the virus to spread even more quickly.
- However, many who have tested positive for coronavirus have been willing to share their stories with the media. Here are some examples:
 - Two of the first coronavirus cases in Kenya spoke to the [Daily Nation newspaper](#)
 - Zimbabwe's third case did an interview with [Zimpapers Television Network](#)
 - A Nigerian woman talks to [Al Jazeera](#) about her experience
 - A Ghanaian man calls for people not to discriminate against survivors on [CTGN Africa](#)
 - A Cameroonian student talks about his experience in China to the [BBC](#)
 - Three South Africans share their story with [IOL](#).
- There have also been lots of famous celebrities and politicians who have tested positive for coronavirus, which have been widely covered in the media including [Al Jazeera](#). For example;
 - Nigerian President's Chief of Staff Abba Kyari, who sadly passed away from the virus
 - Burkina Faso's Foreign Minister, Alpha Barry
 - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the His Royal Highness Prince Charles
 - Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau Nuno Gomes Nabiam
 - Actor Idris Elba
 - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta and Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi
 - Tanzanian rapper Mwana Fa tested positive in March
 - Famous Cameroonian musician Manu Dibango died in March from the virus
 - Somalia's former prime minister Nur Hassan Hussein died in April from the virus.
- In order to encourage more people to share their stories through the media it is important not to discriminate or stigmatise people who have recovered from coronavirus. Once a person has recovered, they are no longer infectious and can return to their home and community and pose no risk to their family, neighbours, and friends. Just as a person can catch the cold or flu and get better, a person can also catch coronavirus and then recover.