



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 we catch coronavirus from Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteers?

- Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteers are well trained on how coronavirus spreads and how to prevent it.
- They are working very hard to help their communities stop the spread of coronavirus by providing important health advice and services – the last thing they would want to do is spread the coronavirus to the people they are trying to help.
- When Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers are in the community, they have strict guidelines to follow to make they keep themselves and others safe from the risk of coronavirus infection.
- These measures include;
  - Avoiding traditional greetings, like handshakes and kisses on the cheek
  - Washing their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before and after they visit each house or carry out an activity
  - Not entering into people's homes and instead having conversations outside or through the window
  - Keeping a safe 2 metre distance from anyone they speak to
  - Not holding meetings with large groups of people all together
  - Making sure clothes, masks, pens, phones, clipboards etc are cleaned with disinfectant at the end of every day
  - Never to come to work if they feel unwell or have any of the symptoms of coronavirus, like a dry cough and fever.
- If you are still worried about speaking to Red Cross volunteers, just keep a two metre distance and avoid any physical greetings. However, do listen to what they have to say as it might be the advice that keeps you and your family safe from coronavirus.

## 2. Do people wearing masks have coronavirus?

- No, not everyone wearing a face mask has coronavirus.
- Many people have made a personal choice to wear a face mask because they feel it will give them protection against coronavirus.
- In some countries, like Kenya for example, the Government has even instructed everyone to wear masks in public places because they believe it can help slow the spread of coronavirus.
- It is also important that healthcare workers in clinics and hospitals wear a face mask, so they protect themselves from catching coronavirus from their patients. This is very important so they stay healthy and can keep providing care to those who need it.
- Anyone who is caring for someone at home who is sick and might have coronavirus should also wear a mask to protect themselves.

- And if someone does have coronavirus, wearing a face mask can prevent them from infecting other people.
- For all those who are wearing a face mask it is important you use it properly;
  - Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer BEFORE you put on the mask
  - Cover your mouth and nose with the mask and make sure there are no gaps or spaces between your face and the mask
  - Do not touch the mask while using it. If you do, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - To remove the mask, do not touch the front but remove the mask from the back and throw it away immediately into a bin that can close. Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - You must always replace the mask when it becomes damp and disposable masks should only be used once
  - For cloth masks, the same rules apply but you need to wash it daily with hot water and soap and let it dry in the sun until completely dry. Don't leave it lying around where it can get dirty, keep it on a clothesline or in a protective bag.

## 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. Can you be infected by touching the body of a person who died from coronavirus?

- There is presently no evidence till today of persons being infected from exposure to dead bodies of COVID-19 cases.
- 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.
- Dead bodies do not release such droplets and are therefore generally not infectious.
- **Coronavirus is different to Ebola:** when a person dies of Ebola, the disease can still be transmitted through direct contacts with the blood or body fluids such as urine, saliva, sweat, faeces and vomit of the person who has died.
- When someone dies of coronavirus, you can bury or cremate the body according to normal practices. It is not necessary to conduct a special burial as we do for people who die of Ebola (we call that process "safe and dignified burials"). While there is no evidence of people catching

coronavirus from the bodies of those who have died from the virus, if you are involved in burial practices you should follow some basic precautions:

- Anyone involved in preparing the body should wear a mask and gloves and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water when they are finished
- Wear a plastic apron or make you sure you wash your clothes in hot water and soap when you are finished
- Don't kiss the body
- Limit the number of people who are involved in preparing the body and ask those who are more vulnerable to coronavirus like the elderly and those with any underlying illnesses to not get involved
- Family and friends can view the body after it has been prepared, but avoid touching and kissing the body and wash hands with soap and water after the viewing
- Wash any clothes or belongings of the person who has died with hot water and soap or disinfectant
- Do not organise large funeral ceremonies as bring lots of people together is a real risk for coronavirus spreading. Instead have a small family ceremony and postpone the big ceremony until after the coronavirus outbreak is over.
- Some National Societies are well experienced in handling dead bodies and are helping to make sure burials of those who have died or might have died of coronavirus are conducted without putting anyone at risk and in a dignified way.

## 4. Why are churches and schools closed?

- In many countries public places like churches, mosques, schools and restaurants have been closed because of coronavirus.
- This is because keeping a safe distance between people is one of the best ways to reduce the spread of the virus.
- 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.
- To make sure a person who is infected does not pass on the disease to others, we need 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).
- This would be difficult to maintain in churches and schools and one sick person could easily infect a high number of people.
- This has happened in this COVID-19 outbreak, where an infected woman in South Korea went to a service and shortly after hundreds of people at the church and surrounding areas tested positive.
- We know this is hard on our society because in these difficult times we need the support of our religious community and we are worried about the education of our children.
- But the impact of the disease spreading widely would be even worse, so we all need to be strong and disciplined until we can put an end to this outbreak together.