



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 children catch COVID-19? Does age matter?

- Yes, children can catch COVID-19. It is possible for people of any age, including children and infants to be infected with COVID-19.
- Current evidence suggests that children are not as likely to develop severe COVID-19 as adults. However, children are just as likely to become infected as any other age group and can spread the disease to other children, adults, including those who are more vulnerable to developing COVID-19 complications.
- So far there are relatively few cases of COVID-19 among children – according to WHO data, people under 18 years of age represent 1-3% of reported cases, even though this group of people make up 29% of the global population. A reason for this could be because children are more likely to have mild or asymptomatic infection, meaning that the infection may go undetected or undiagnosed.
- Even though elderly people or those with existing illnesses are more at risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, there have been reports of clusters of children and adolescents requiring intensive care because of a multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. This is a rare but serious complication associated with COVID-19 where different body parts become inflamed.
- More research needs to be done for us to learn more about how it affects children.
- It is very important to note that young people and children can still spread COVID-19 to other people even if they have mild or no symptoms at all. This is why everyone, including children and young people, must follow prevention measures to protect those around them, particularly elderly family members like grandparents or those with other illnesses.
- To protect your children from COVID-19, encourage them to practice the measures that will keep them safe such as – keep a distance of at least 2 meters from others, frequently wash their hands with soap, and stay at home if they feel unwell. If your child's symptoms worsen or you are worried about their health call your local healthcare provider for medical advice.

2. Why is it still important to wear a face mask or practise physical distancing?

- COVID-19 is not over in Africa. We still need to do everything we can do stop the spread of the virus and that includes wearing a mask and keeping a safe distance from others.
- COVID-19 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.
- Wearing a mask helps to prevent the spread of infection by providing a barrier that stops these droplets from leaving an infected person's nose or mouth or getting into a healthy person's nose or mouth.
- Keeping a safe 2m distance from other people works because then you are not physically close enough for these droplets to reach you, if someone infected is talking, coughing or sneezing.
- Because many infected persons do not show symptoms, the virus can spread undetected. This means it is important to wear a face mask *and* practice safe physical distancing.
- If it is not possible to practice a safe physical distancing, for example if you are caring for a sick person or in a crowded place, it is even more important to wear a face mask.
- The outbreak is far from over yet. In some countries lock downs and restrictions are being reduced. The reason for that is that 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.
- We have seen people 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.

As always, prevention is better than cure. Let us lead as an example and follow the 5 rules below to protect ourselves and our loved ones, and put an end to this pandemic:

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 and wear a face mask. 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. How can I protect myself on public transport?

-
- COVID-19 spreads from person to person, which is why it is important that we keep a physical distance of 2 meters from others to protect ourselves from the virus
- However, this can be difficult to practice when taking public transportation such as buses or shared taxis
- To protect yourself and others when using public transportation, follow these general principles:
 - Use transportation that enforces physical distancing, such as keeping empty seats between people
 - Open a window if you can for ventilation
 - Always wear a mask while you're using public transportation
 - Travel during quieter times or change routes and stations to avoid busy areas
 - Walk part or all of the journey instead of taking public transport for short journey
 - Before you leave and once you reach your destination, wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol as soon as possible and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Following these tips can help you stay safe even when physical distancing is difficult.

4. How are burials being done for people who die from COVID-19?

- If someone has died from COVID-19 they can be buried or cremated.
- The wishes of your deceased family member or friend may continue to be honoured.
- There are currently no known cases of people being infected with COVID-19 from exposure to the body of someone who has died from the virus. Dead bodies do not release droplets, which is how the disease spreads, and are therefore generally not infectious. However, precautions are still required when planning and holding funeral services to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among those in attendance.
- If you are involved in burial practices, you should follow these basic measures:
 - Anyone involved in preparing the body should wear a mask and gloves and wash their hands well with soap and water when they are finished
 - Wear a plastic apron or make sure you wash your clothes in hot water and soap when you are finished
 - Wash any clothes or belongings of the person who has died with hot water and soap or disinfectant
 - Limit the number of people who are involved in preparing the body
 - Family and friends can view the body after it has been prepared, but avoid touching and kissing the body and wash hands with soap after the viewing
- Do not organise large funeral ceremonies as this brings a lot of people together and the risk of the virus spreading increases. Instead, have a small family ceremony or consider inviting people to join online if possible or postpone the big ceremony until the COVID-19 outbreak is over.

COVID-19: ASK DR BEN

#19 - AFRICA REGION – 07 SEPTEMBER 2020



- For in person funerals, follow everyday preventive actions to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 such as the 5 simple rules found on page 2.
- Do not attend a funeral or service if you are sick or if you might have been exposed to COVID-19. Those who have higher risk of severe illness or death, such as the elderly or those with existing diseases, should consider carefully attending funerals as this may be a risk of exposure to a person with COVID-19, especially if recommendations for wearing masks and social distancing may be difficult to follow for themselves or others.
- For more information on safe body handling and burial practices for COVID-19, please see: https://preparecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID_MotD_IFRC-ICRC_July2020_web-1.pdf

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.