



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 traditional healers treat COVID-19?

- Firstly, let's be clear about the difference between a vaccine, a cure, a treatment, and a remedy:
 - **A vaccine** is something that will protect you from catching the virus in the first place. For example, the measles vaccination for children.
 - **A cure** will kill the virus inside the body and make it go away completely. For example, taking medicine for malaria aims to kill the parasite in the blood.
 - **A treatment** is a medical intervention that reduces the severity of the impact of the disease. It will not kill the virus but can reduce the impact the virus has on the body and help people recover more quickly. For example, medicine for HIV does not cure the virus, but can help people manage the disease and improve their quality of life.
 - **A remedy** can help you feel a little better when you are ill by addressing the symptoms of a disease but will not have any impact on the disease itself. For example, paracetamol can ease the fever of malaria but will not do anything to stop the malaria itself.
- So far, no medicines have been approved yet to prevent, cure or treat COVID-19, from Africa or from anywhere else in the world.
- Before a medicine can be approved, it needs to be properly tested to make sure it is safe for people to use and has been proven to work against COVID-19.
- Scientists all over the world are working hard to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 and different medicines are being tested to see if they can successfully cure or treat the virus, but these tests take time and we do not have the evidence yet to say that something can definitely prevent, cure or treat COVID-19.
- If you do fall sick with a cold, flu or even COVID-19, herbs or traditional medicines might help ease the symptoms like a sore throat or fever, but they will not kill the virus (cure) or treat the disease (treatment). For example, drinking hot lemon and ginger can ease the pain of a sore throat when you have a cold, but it will not cure the cold or make it go away any quicker.
- Therefore, traditional healers might be able to help with remedies that make you feel better, especially if you have mild symptoms, but they would not be able to help you prevent, cure or treat COVID-19.
- If you or your family have COVID-19 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.

- Most people who catch COVID-19 can recover at home and won't need to go to a hospital or treatment centre. However, it is important that you do get a doctor's advice as they will be able to tell you if you can stay home and rely on home remedies, like lemon and ginger or paracetamol, or if you need to go to a hospital for more specialist medical care.
- Remember prevention is always better than cure, so the best thing you can do is follow the five simple rules below to keep yourself and your family safe.

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.

2. What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

- Quarantine and isolation are both very important and effective actions that will help to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.
- This is because COVID-19 spreads from person to person and quarantine and isolation both work by separating people who have or might have the virus, from the rest of the population. Therefore, during quarantine or isolation it is very important you do not have contact with any other people. This reduces the chances of the virus spreading through communities.
- **Quarantine** means separating people who have been or could have been in contact with someone infected with COVID-19 but have not become sick. People in quarantine might not have COVID-19 but they pose a risk because they have been in close contact with someone who has the virus, and therefore they could have it too and accidentally pass it on to others.
- The duration of quarantine for COVID-19 is usually 14 days. This is because it takes a maximum of two weeks for COVID-19 to develop after you have been in contact with someone who has the virus. If after two weeks of quarantine you don't have COVID-19, then you are no longer at risk for spreading the virus to others and can leave quarantine.
- **Isolation** means separating a person infected with COVID-19 from other people that are not infected so they do not accidentally spread the virus to their family, friends and community.
- Isolation can either take place in centres specifically set up for COVID-19, or at home.
- Patients who have mild or no symptoms and do not need medical care, can self-isolate in their homes. This means they have to stay in a separate room if possible, and keep a distance of at least 2m to all other household members. Two metres 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). A medical mask should always be worn when interacting with other household member while maintaining distance.

- If you are caring for someone with COVID-19, or have COVID-19 yourself, you should always wear a disposable medical mask to reduce the risk of spreading the virus when you talk, cough or sneeze. Follow this guidance:
 - Change your mask as soon as it becomes damp
 - Disposable masks cannot be used for more than a day, and they cannot be washed.
 - Dispose of used masked safely in a closed bin
- 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.
- If you test positive but have no symptoms you must isolate for **10 days** or according to the requirements of your Ministry of Health after taking the test.
- If you have symptoms, like a fever, dry cough or difficulty breathing, you have to keep isolating until you meet these three conditions:
 - Your symptoms have improved
 - You have not had a fever for three days
 - It has been at least 10 days since your symptoms first started.

3. What happens if you are tested positive for COVID-19?

- If you test positive for COVID-19, the most important thing is that you do not have contact with other people. This will stop you from accidentally passing the virus on to family, friends and others and help end this outbreak as soon as possible.
- If you test positive for COVID-19, what happens next depends on the country you live in. In some countries, people who test positive but do not show any symptoms, can isolate at home. In other countries all patients, no matter if they show symptoms or not, are isolated in specific areas of a health clinic or hospital, or special isolation centres. COVID-19 patients are kept separate from other patients, to make sure no one catches the virus when going to the hospital for other reasons.
- If you are isolated in a health clinic, hospital or special isolation centre, you will be well cared for.
- A person suffering from more severe symptoms will be treated in a health clinic, a hospital or a special treatment centre so they can get the medical care they need.
- If you are found to have COVID-19, you must follow the advice given to you by the doctor so that the symptoms do not get worse and you have the best chance of recovery.
- When isolating at home, the sick person needs to be separated from the rest of the household members and a distance of at least 2m needs to be kept. Two metres 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). A medical mask must be worn whenever interacting with other household members, while maintaining distancing requirements.

4. How long can the virus survive on surfaces?

- 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. 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.
- A recent study found that the COVID-19 coronavirus can survive up to **four hours** on copper, up to **24 hours** on cardboard, and up to **two to three days on plastic and stainless steel**, in laboratory conditions
- There's a lot we still don't know, such as how exposure to sunlight, heat, or cold, can affect how long the virus stays on surfaces.
- However, we do know that if you clean touched surfaces and objects frequently with disinfectant you will kill any virus particles. This includes counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables.
- In addition, wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water after bringing in packages, or after trips to shops, markets or other places where you may have come into contact with infected surfaces. And don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth unless your hands are clean.
- 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 two.

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.