



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 a breastfeeding mother pass on COVID-19 to her child?

- No, there is no evidence a mother can pass COVID-19 on to her child through breastmilk and breastfeeding.
- Breastfeeding is very healthy for the baby and the mother and should not be discouraged or stopped because of worries about COVID-19.
- The benefits of skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding your baby far outweigh the potential risks of transmission and illness associated with COVID-19.
- If you are worried about passing COVID-19 onto your baby just follow these precautions before you breastfeed:
 - Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before you pick up your baby and start breastfeeding.
 - Don't sneeze or cough near your baby – instead sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, and then throw it away and wash your hands immediately after with soap and water.
 - Wear a face mask while you breastfeed to be extra cautious.
- Even if you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 you can still breastfeed your baby safely. Just follow the precautions above and wear a medical face mask when you have contact with your baby, including while feeding. You should also routinely clean and disinfect surfaces that you have touched. And don't let your baby touch your nose or mouth.
- COVID-19 spreads when someone who is infected with the virus coughs, sneezes or talks, and the droplets they release get into the eyes, nose or mouth of a healthy person. These droplets fall on floors or surfaces, so people can also pick them up on their hands and infect themselves if they then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.
- So to keep your baby safe, you need to make sure they don't come into contact with any COVID-19 droplets – either directly from another person coughing, sneezing or talking next to them or by touching surfaces that could have the virus on them and then putting their hands in their mouth, eyes or nose.
- 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. Can COVID-19 make you infertile?

- There is currently no scientific evidence that COVID-19 can cause male or female infertility.
- There is still a lot we don't know about COVID-19 and scientific studies still need to be conducted to have clearer information on the long-term effects of the disease.
- What we know is that high fever can reduce male fertility for a short period of time. This is linked to the fever that is caused by the illness and can lead to overheating of testicles. But this is not permanent, it is similar to the effect of taking a hot bath.
- Considering that one of the primary symptoms of COVID-19 is a high fever, it is reasonable to assume that men infected with coronavirus may also experience slightly reduced fertility, if high fever is experienced.

3. Who should wear a mask?

- Firstly, it is important to understand the difference between medical or surgical masks and cloth masks.
- **Medical masks** can protect the wearer from either spreading COVID-19 or catching it. These masks should be worn by:
 - Health care workers
 - People who have COVID-19 symptoms, such as a cough, fever, or sore throat
 - People who are caring for someone who might have COVID-19
- There is a world-wide shortage of masks, so WHO urges people to use masks wisely and make sure there are enough for healthcare workers.
- This is because healthcare workers need to 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.
- Medical masks should only be used once. They cannot be washed and reused.
- **Cloth masks** can act as barrier to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from the wearer to others.
- In countries where the Government has instructed everyone to wear masks in public places, cloth masks are a good option as they ensure there are enough medical masks left for health staff, and they can be washed and reused so are a cheaper option.
- In areas with high rates of COVID-19 infections and where it would be difficult to maintain a safe distance from other people – like busy markets, public transport, or other crowded places – wearing a cloth mask could help reduce the spread of infection.

- Unlike medical masks, cloth masks can be home-made. Just make sure they cover the nose, mouth, and chin, are secured with elastic loops or ties around the ear or head, have more than one layer of fabric and are washable.
- A medical or cloth mask will only work if you use them properly. Here is how to use your mask 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 you must never use a mask more than once if it is a single use mask.
 - 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.
- **It is not true** that wearing a mask for long time can lead to oxygen reduction in the blood and brain and make you ill. Masks are not tight enough to stop you breathing. Also, doctors wear face masks in hospitals all day and they do not get sick.
- Remember, a mask alone is not enough to protect you from COVID-19. You also have to follow the other prevention measures on page one, like regularly washing your hands and limiting your contact with other people.

4. What is the incubation period of COVID-19?

- When we talk about **incubation period**, we mean the time between the moment a person is infected with the virus and the moment the person starts showing symptoms.
- Health care professionals and government officials use this number to decide how long people need to stay away from others during an outbreak.
- For COVID-19, it takes an average of 5 to 6 days to develop symptoms once you have been exposed to the virus. However, it can take **up to 14 days**.
- This period is different to Ebola for example, for which can take up to 21 days to develop symptoms.
- This is the reason why quarantine lasts for 14 days. Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. It helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms.
- Some people may not know that they have it because their symptoms are very mild.
- It is also important to note that it is possible that people infected with COVID-19 could transmit the virus before significant symptoms develop. There is data suggesting that some people can test positive for COVID-19 from 1-3 days before they develop symptoms.
- For this reason, we have to make sure we stay away from other people in case there is a chance we were exposed to the virus and wait for 14 days, to make sure we don't spread the disease to other people without even knowing.