



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 COVID-19 be transmitted via mosquito bites?

- No, there is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through mosquitos or house flies.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that 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.
- A person can also become infected by touching a contaminated surface (where these droplets have landed) and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth before washing their hands.
- To protect yourself, keep at least 2-meter distance from others, disinfect frequently touched surfaces (like doorknobs, tables, and light switches). Clean your hands thoroughly with soap or use a hand-sanitizer with 70% alcohol, and avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose before cleaning your hands.

2. How can we make our friends and families understand COVID-19 is real?

- If your friends and family think COVID-19 is not real or that it doesn't affect them, try to engage in a conversation with them about COVID-19 and the health measures that have been designed to keep us safe.
- Try to understand their opinions, why do they think that it is not real, or that it does not affect them? Where do they get their information from? We need to be aware of their thoughts and emotions if we want to engage in a conversation.
- Many people believe that the pandemic is over because Governments have started to ease lockdown restrictions, but this doesn't mean that the outbreak is over or that it can no longer affect us. For example, cases in Europe have started to rise again after lockdowns were lifted and people became complacent.
- The same thing can happen in African countries if we are not careful. It's important that you share accurate information with your family and friends which include facts about case and death numbers of COVID-19.
- It's also important that you don't just tell people what to do, but explain to your family and friends why it is important to follow health measures like physical distancing,

washing their hands or wearing a face mask, in order to protect themselves and others from the virus.

- Take the time to explain how following these measures can help in preventing the spread of infection and keep us safe. For example, keeping a safe 2m distance from other people works because an infected person who is talking, coughing or sneezing near you, will not be physically close enough for these droplets to reach you.
- Cleaning your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer will help in killing any viruses that are on your hands and stop them getting into your body.
- Wearing a mask helps to prevent the spread of infection by providing a barrier that stops the droplets from leaving an infected person's nose or mouth and it also stops the droplets from getting into a healthy person's nose or mouth.
- But, remember that you don't have control over other people's actions so don't get into an argument or a fight to try to change their minds. Leading by example and following the preventative health measures yourself can have a positive impact on the behaviours of your friends and family members.

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 we protect our children from COVID-19 when going back to school?

- As some schools in Africa start to reopen, children and parents are likely to be feeling many different emotions. For many parents, they might feel scared or nervous for the health and safety of their children when they go back to school.
- This is why it is better to be prepared and teach your child how they can keep themselves safe when they are back in school.
- One of the best ways you can help your child keep safe from COVID-19 is by encouraging them to regularly wash their hands with soap. Practise handwashing at home and explain why it is important to wash his or her hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds,

especially before and after eating, using the toilet, coughing/sneezing or touching a face mask.

- You can sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice or sing along to their favourite song or do a dance together to make learning fun.
- When soap or water is not available, suggest that your child use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol. Also, explain that he or she should avoid touching his or her eyes, nose and mouth to avoid catching the virus.
- You can also teach your child how to cover their mouth with their bent elbow or a tissue if they need to cough or sneeze.
- It is also a good idea to show your child what 2 meters looks like, which is about the arm span of an average adult (if you stand with both arms outstretched, it is the length from one fingertip to the other fingertip). So when they go to school they can imagine 2m and keep that distance between themselves and other people.
- Don’t forget to make sure your child is up to date with all recommended vaccines so that he or she can stay strong and healthy.
- Ask your child to tell you if they start to feel like they have a fever, cough or are having difficulty breathing. If they feel unwell, call your local Ministry of Health and ask for medical advice. You should also call their school to let them know that your child is unwell so that the school can take the right precautions.
- Even though children with COVID-19 commonly show mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, they can still spread the virus so your child should stay at home until they recover.
- Make sure that you protect the rest of your family members too especially those that are elderly and/or have a medical condition. Remember to monitor your child’s symptoms and make sure they get plenty of rest and stay hydrated.

4. Where can we access information about the evolution of the pandemic?

- Since the start of the pandemic there has been a spread of fake or false information on the origins of the virus, who it affects and how serious the symptoms are. But rumours and myths can have severe consequences because it can be hard to know where to access trustworthy information.
- Misinformation can lead people to feeling afraid, paranoid and it can lead to stigmatisation of people who have been affected by COVID-19.
- So it is important that we keep ourselves well informed by using reliable sources of information. Here are some tips on how you can tell what information is reliable:
 - Check who the author of the information is – is the author an expert on the subject? Does the author use facts or is he or she just sharing their opinion?
 - Check where the information comes from. Trustworthy sources of information are for example, WHO, the Ministry of Health, and public health or humanitarian health organisations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, MSF and UN.
 - Check the date of the information – when was the video or article made? Are the images used in the video or article current or was it taken from a different crisis or time?
 - Check other sites to see if the same information was published there too. If it was, see how the information was treated in the other sites.

COVID-19: ASK DR BEN

#21 - AFRICA REGION – 05 OCTOBER 2020



- Check whether the information is consistent by reading more than just the title. If there are inconsistencies in the information or images, treat this information as suspicious.
- If you suspect that the information you have found is fake do not share it with others because this will contribute to the spread of misinformation. Instead, you can correct rumours that you hear with facts from the reliable information you have found.
- Accurate information can save lives because we will know how to protect ourselves and others. For the most up to date information on COVID-19 and the pandemic you can visit the WHO website https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=Cj0KCQjwk8b7BRCaARIsAARRTL7CdqoL7GHRTA7891MLY7dLG8ldNd3RT19dvt5DKoXY92HbVlz_giAaArhKEALw_wcB

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.