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. Why is stigma a problem?

- There is a lot of confusion, anxiety and fear associated with COVID-19. This is understandable because it is a new disease, but unfortunately, this is causing some people to be scared of and discriminate against anyone who has had COVID-19 or anyone they think might have the virus.
- This is very dangerous, because it could lead people to hide symptoms, refuse to get tested or delay in seeking medical care, because they are afraid of how others will treat them. If we hide the virus it will only spread more quickly and lead to even more deaths.
- The fear of stigma and discrimination is also affecting people's willingness to share their stories of being affected by COVID-19 and so contributing to the belief that the virus is not real or only affects famous people or politicians.
- You can recover naturally from COVID-19, the same way you can recover from a cold or flu infection.
- People who have recovered from COVID-19 are not infectious anymore and cannot spread the virus to others. Do not be afraid of people who have had COVID-19, they are no risk to you or their community.
- Don't spread fear and stigma. Instead, help stop this disease by showing empathy and kindness to those affected and welcome people who have recovered back into the family and community and celebrate them as heroes who have won the battle against COVID-19.

2. Can people who have recovered still infect other people?

- Current evidence shows that once a person has fully recovered from COVID-19 and the virus has left their body they are no longer infectious to other people.
- If you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 you should stay at home and self-isolate for 14 days before interacting with others even if you show mild or no symptoms. This also means avoiding physical contact with your partner for 14 days, which includes no sex, no intimate touching, and no kissing.
- A safe rule is to say a person is no longer infectious once these three conditions have been met:

- o   Your symptoms have improved
- o   You have not had a fever for three days
- o   It has been at least 10 days since your symptoms first started
- Once these conditions have been met then you can freely interact with others and even resume intimate contact with your partner.
- However, even after you have fully recovered from COVID-19, you must keep practising everyday preventive actions outlined below.

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. Try to avoid crowded places and 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. If this is not possible, make sure you wear your face mask. 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 I use ash instead of soap?

- One of the most effective, cheapest, and most important ways to prevent the spread of the virus is to wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water. However, sometimes soap is not easily available. In these cases, an alternative solution is to use ash with water.
- WHO considers ash less effective than soap and recommend it is only used for cleaning hands when soap is **not** available.
- Unlike soap, there is no evidence that ash can kill or remove the COVID-19 virus from our hands.
- However, in settings where soap is not available or it is limited, ash may be more effective than handwashing with water alone. Rinsing and the action of rubbing hands together while washing appear to be as important as the material used to clean the hands (soap, ash or water alone).
- If you are using ash to clean your hands make sure you are using the white ash from the centre of a fire once cooled as it is likely to be the most sterile as it was heated at the highest temperature.

- After you have finished cleaning your hand with soap or ash remember to dry them thoroughly using a clean cloth as germs spread more easily from wet skin than from dry skin, so drying your hands is an important step for effective hand hygiene.

4. Does hot water and lemon help to prevent COVID-19?

- Drinking warm water and lemon or any acidic drink has no effect on preventing or killing the COVID-19 virus. This belief comes from the theory that viruses cannot live in acidic environments, so drinking or gargling with lemon water is thought to kill it.
- However, scientists have found that COVID-19 can survive in different conditions including in hot and acidic environments and there is no evidence that drinking warm lemon water has protected people from the virus.
- Drinking hot water and lemon might help ease a sore throat or cough but it will not prevent, cure or kill the virus.
- However consuming lemon water can have other health benefits, it can keep you hydrated, and the lemons contain vitamin C, which is important for your overall health.
- The best way to prevent COVID-19 is by frequently washing your hands with soap and physical distancing from others by at least 1 meter. To keep yourself and others safe from COVID-19 follow the 5 simple rules that are outlined in page 2.

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.