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. How can families protect themselves from COVID-19 at home?

- Families, couples and people living together should still follow the public health measures in their households to keep the virus out of their home and prevent spreading the infection to each other.
- If a household has one or more high-risk people (if they are above 60 years or have a pre-existing medical condition), then **all household members should act as if they themselves are also at higher risk** of severe COVID-19 symptoms.
- If a household has one or more high-risk people then members should leave their home only when it's necessary, for example to buy food, to go a pharmacy, or for medical appointments. If you need to leave your home, try not to take public transport. If possible, walk, cycle or use a car if you have one. Practice the public health measures when you're outside such as staying 2 meters away from other people, wearing a mask if physical distancing is not possible and washing your hands with soap and water immediately after you return.
- As much as possible, keep a physical distance with your household members that are at higher risk and try to avoid hugging or kissing them.
- Clean thoroughly with soap and water shared cooking utensils, dishes and towels after use and try not to share these with household members that are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms.
- Disinfect surfaces and objects at home that are frequently touched like door and window handles, kitchen and food preparation areas, counter tops, toilets, water taps, light switches and tv remote controls.
- To disinfect surfaces, chlorine/bleach can be used or a disinfectant that has 70-90% alcohol. But, be very careful when you're using these chemicals, remember to wear gloves and open the windows to ensure good ventilation.
- Limit the number of visitors that come inside your home, including friends, neighbours and other family members that don't live with you.

2. Can I still play sports and be active during COVID-19?

- Yes, you can still play sports or exercise during the pandemic as long as you are still able to practise physical distancing and it's in line with the movement restrictions in your country.
- During the pandemic, people of all ages should stay as active as possible. Being active is good for your health, both physical and mental, because it helps your body stay strong and fight illnesses, it gives you energy, improves your mood and helps you sleep better.
- Physical activities can be playing a sport, walking, dancing, gardening or cleaning your home. Even taking a short break from sitting down, by doing 3-5 minutes of stretching or walking is better than nothing.
- You can make it a routine by practising activities or sports for 30 minutes or 1 hour a few times a week, for example. If you have access to the internet, you can make it more fun by joining online fitness classes or setting up your own online physical exercises with your friends and family.
- The most important thing is that you find an activity that is fun, which can be done within the movement restrictions that are in place in your country and makes you feel good.

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. Aside from public health measures, how else can we protect ourselves from COVID-19?

- Washing your hands and practising physical distancing are great practical ways to take care of your physical health during the pandemic. But, it is also important to take care of our mental health. Here are some tips you can follow:
  - There is a lot of news and misinformation about COVID-19, which can make you anxious, lonely or distressed You should **stay informed about COVID-19 news**, but limit yourself to only reading information from official sources (like Africa CDC or WHO) and restrict the amount of time you spend checking the latest COVID-19 updates each day. Limiting yourself to 30 minutes a day, for example, can help to reduce anxiety levels.
  - **Take care of your body** by keeping yourself active with daily activities (cleaning, cooking, learning, or schoolwork) and eating healthy meals. If possible, spend some time outside to get fresh air. If you're high risk or living with someone who is high risk then try opening the windows instead. Exercise regularly, even it's just 3-5 minutes stretching and walking after long hours of sitting down and get plenty of sleep!
  - **Stay connected** with your friends, organise fun and relaxing activities together that respect the physical distancing measures. It's important to remind ourselves that others care and that we are not alone. If you are feeling stressed or anxious **don't ignore your thoughts and feelings, get support**. Try talking to a family member or friend. You can also contact your local MoH to find out if there are any organisations that can give you mental health support.

4. Can you catch COVID-19 from hospitals?

- You might have some concerns about being exposed to COVID-19 in hospital, but hospitals are doing everything they can to keep patients, visitors, and staff safe during the pandemic. For example, all hospital staff, visitors, and outpatients should wear a face mask when inside hospital areas. Hospitals will have hand sanitizer and soap available for people to clean their hands and waiting areas should be organised in a way that ensures everyone can keep a safe distance from each other.
- In some hospitals, they might take your temperature or ask you if have had symptoms of COVID-19 to make sure that you are not carrying the virus.
- Not every hospital is treating COVID-19 patients, but the hospitals that are have a system to allow people who have tested positive for COVID-19, or have symptoms, to be separated from people who don't. This helps to make sure the risk of getting the virus is as low as possible.
- Hospitals also have infection prevention and control systems to keep the hospital as clean and safe as possible. There are staff in hospitals that are responsible for disinfecting surfaces and cleaning every room to reduce the risk of spreading infections.

- To limit the number of people inside a hospital, you might be asked to attend a consultation by yourself. In some places, they might even have a consultation online or by telephone.
- But if you need to go to a hospital because you feel unwell, or to receive medication or treatment for another illness or for routine vaccinations then don't let the fear of catching COVID-19 stop you from getting the medical care that you need. Not going to a hospital when you need to can cause problems to your health in the future. You can call your local MoH for more information on what measures hospitals in your area have put in place to keep visitors, staff and patients safe.

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.