



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 should we go to a doctor if there is no cure?

- Even if scientists have not been able to find an effective cure or treatment for COVID-19 this doesn't mean that you shouldn't go to a doctor if you feel unwell or if you suspect you have the virus.
- Waiting too long to see a doctor or ignoring symptoms can lead to hospitalization or in some cases even death. If a doctor is aware of your condition, they can give you medical advice to help relieve your symptoms so that you don't feel discomfort and they can help to prevent your symptoms from getting worse.
- Most COVID-19 cases begin gradually with mild symptoms and progress into severe symptoms, especially in elderly people or people living with a pre-existing medical condition. Make sure that you monitor your symptoms even if you have mild signs of COVID-19 and call your doctor or local Ministry of Health so they can help you to safely self-manage your symptoms at home.
- If your symptoms develop into a high fever or you start to experience difficulties breathing and chest pain call your doctor or local Ministry of Health and they can tell you which clinic or hospital you can go to receive medical care. Do not go to a hospital or health facility without calling first because they might not have the appropriate equipment to care for you, which can put you and others at risk.

2. Why are schools reopened if there are still COVID-19 cases?

- Before a Government decides to reopen schools, they must measure the impact or risk of this on the education system, well-being and health of students, teachers and the wider community.
- Some studies show that since lockdowns were put in place and schools closed there has been rising levels of alcohol/drug abuse, depression, fear, loneliness, domestic violence and child abuse. With many people not being able to earn an income during the pandemic, this has also increased stress in many households.

- During lockdown many parents have not been able to go to work and make a living. If lockdown is lifted but schools remain closed, this increases the risk of children being left alone at home.
- In some areas, the closure of schools has also meant that students have not been able to continue their education because remote learning is not possible, leaving many gaps in children's education.
- The benefit of reopening schools is that students will be able to continue their studies and go to the next educational level. It would also mean that they can have access to essential services like food, psychological support, and access to reliable information on how to keep themselves safe.
- But before a school reopens, public health measures need to be considered. The school should work with the local MoH to make sure that everything is in place to prevent a spread of cases inside of the school such as making sure student desks are 2 meters apart, that water and soap are available, that students have access to face masks if that is required to wear, etc.
- If schools are reopening in your area that doesn't mean that the outbreak has ended or that we can relax and not follow the preventative measures. We need to continue following the measures (see page 2) to stop the spread of cases and keep ourselves and children safe. See this [factsheet](#) for more information on how we can protect our children when schools reopen.

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. Is steaming a treatment for COVID-19?

- Steam baths or steam inhalation is sometimes used as a home remedy for common colds and respiratory infections because some people believe that the steam opens the nose, reduces inflammation or that the heat will kill the virus but there is **no evidence** to prove that these methods work in relieving symptoms or treating viruses, including COVID-19.

- In fact, this method can be **dangerous** to practice because using steam on the body can cause burns and injuries if it's too hot, which can lead to hospital admissions, surgery and permanent scarring.
- There is no effective or safe treatment for COVID-19 yet. The best and only thing that we can do is to follow the public health measures such as cleaning your hands frequently with soap and water, keeping a 2 meter distance from others, if you need to cough or sneeze use a tissue or your bent elbow to cover your nose and mouth and wear a face mask when physical distancing is not possible.

4. Can I share my face mask with others?

- No, you should never share a face mask with anyone else even if they are a close friend or family member.
- 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.
- Wearing a face mask creates a barrier that stops these droplets from leaving an infected person's nose or mouth and from getting into a healthy person's nose or mouth.
- If we share our mask with other people, we can accidentally pass our infection onto them because the droplets that we release will be trapped inside of the mask. Even if you think you don't have the virus you should never share your mask or use someone else's mask because you might have the virus and not know it because you are not experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.
- In fact, medical masks should only be used once even if it's the same person wearing them. For fabric masks, you need to wash them daily with hot water and soap and do not share your clean mask with other family members. Each person in your household should have their own mask.
- For more information on who should wear a mask and how to care for them see this [factsheet](#).