



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 traditional herbs or natural remedies cure COVID-19?

We must be clear there is currently no cure for COVID-19, which is why it is still important to wear a face mask in public places, remain 2m apart from people not in your household, and to regularly wash your hands to protect yourself and your family.

Currently there are vaccines in circulation. It is important to remember that vaccines are not a cure as they can only stop people from contracting COVID-19 and becoming seriously ill. Treatments will still be needed for those who already have it.

- Many herbs and traditional medicines are claimed to cure or prevent COVID-19, but none of them have been shown to work and have not been approved by health organizations such as WHO (World Health Organization) and the CDC Africa (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) have taken the responsibility to conduct. number of clinical trials. Unfortunately, none of the herbal and traditional medicines has proved to be effective in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19.
- As it stands now, there is no Herbal/Traditional medicine that can be beneficial in COVID-19 management thus any claims of herbal cures should be handled with caution. If you require more information about herbal cures and their use, you should fact check using the relevant sites such as the Ministry of Public Health hotline and WHO websites.
- If you get sick, some herbs or traditional medicines might help ease the symptoms of coronavirus, like a sore throat or cough, but they will not prevent or cure the disease.
- If you or your family have COVID-19 symptoms, like a fever and dry cough or difficulty breathing, you should call your Ministry of Health hotline, a local hospital or doctor to ask for advice.
- It is important that you follow this advice because it is based on what physicians and hospitals have found to be effective against COVID-19.

## 2. How long is the COVID-19 test valid for?

It can take anything from a few hours to several days to receive COVID-19 test results. The length of time will vary depending on the type of test and where it took place.

Once a COVID-19 test is administered and results are delivered, a certificate is issued indicating whether the patient is positive or negative of the virus. The certificate shows that the patient was positive or negative between the time the test took place and the time the result emission was issued. A person may contract the virus if exposed and unprotected after the last sample collection thus it is important to COVID-19 preventive protocols after testing. The test result should therefore be interpreted as a snapshot taken at that precise moment when the saliva or blood was collected.

How to tell if a COVID-19 test is Valid and for how long:

- **Personal test:** If a person tests negative for the COVID-19 the test is valid from the day the results were received until contact with a sick person(s) or until a separate test is undertaken that differs from the original.
- **Travel purposes:** Many countries have issued instructions on mandatory COVID-19 testing before entering and exiting their states. The standard test required by most authorities and airlines is the COVID-19 PCR test. There may be a variation between countries and airlines on when the COVID-19 PCR test must be done, but normally it is between 24 to 96 hours (about 4 days) before departure to the destination.

There are some countries who also require a COVID-19 PCR test to be administered when departing their country. However, it is highly recommended that each passenger be aware of the respective rules set by the national authorities and airlines to ensure proper compliance with the procedures.

### 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 help 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. Can COVID-19 be transmitted through bodily fluids such as saliva, urine, or faeces?

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease. The practices aimed at preventing the virus from spreading focus on stopping the mucus or saliva droplets from an infected person, which can be transmitted through coughing or sneezing, from contacting a healthy person. So, can the virus be spread through other bodily fluids?

The short answer, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO (World Health Organization), is that there's not enough data to know for sure.

From the evidence at hand, medical experts have made these observations about transmission of the COVID-19 virus:

- **Blood or faeces:** COVID-19 has been detected in blood and faecal samples there have been no reports to date of transmission of COVID-19 through blood or faeces.
- **Saliva:** The virus can be transmitted by kissing or coughing, as the virus is transmitted via droplets present in saliva.
- **Sweat:** There is no evidence that the virus can be spread by perspiration
- **Vomit, urine, breast milk, semen:** Currently there are no reports whether such fluids from an infected person can contain viable, infectious COVID-19 virus.

It remains important to protect yourself with personal protective equipment whenever contact with bodily fluids may occur and to clean your hands frequently.

## 4. Why don't they test in schools?

- Maintaining quality education for all despite the health crisis caused by COVID-19 has been a considerable challenge for all education systems.
- Mass testing is unlikely to take place in many schools because of logistical and financial constraints.
- Organizations that are offering support for the opening of safe education in Africa such as the WHO and UNICEF (United Nations International Childrens Emergency Fund) have recommended a range of hygiene and disinfection measures for schools to reopen and operate safely.
- This includes regular handwashing, daily disinfection and cleaning of surfaces, basic water, sanitation and waste management facilities, and environmental cleaning and decontamination.
- Some schools have introduced an open-air class strategy where the students learn in open fields while socially distanced to ensure control over spread of COVID-19 virus.
- For further information on school reopening measures, you can visit the relevant health sites such as [WHO website](#) or contact your local health authorities.

# COVID-19: ASK DR BEN

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IF THERE ARE QUESTIONS OR RUMOURS SPREADING IN YOUR COUNTRY CONTACT [MATHEUS.BIZARRIA@IFRC.ORG](mailto:MATHEUS.BIZARRIA@IFRC.ORG) AND WE CAN TRY TO ADDRESS THEM IN THIS FACT SHEET.