



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 we care for COVID-19 patients at home?

- People who have COVID-19 but have mild symptoms or no symptoms can be cared for at home, but this should first be confirmed by a doctor and be part of local Ministry of Health guidelines.
- If someone with COVID-19 is being cared for at home, it is important to try and keep them separated from other family members.
- To protect household members from also catching the virus, limit the number of people caring for the patient. The caregiver should not be someone with an underlying health condition.
- Other measures that household members need to do to protect themselves include:
 - Choose a separate room for the patient to stay in while they recover, if this is not possible then keep a minimum distance of 2 meters from each other
 - Make sure there is good ventilation in the room of the patient and also in shared living spaces by opening windows and doors
 - The patient should wear a face mask as much as possible, but especially when they are not alone in a room and when physical distancing is not possible
 - Caregivers and household members should also wear a medical face mask when they are in the same room as the patient. **Do not** touch the mask or face, throw away the mask after leaving the room and wash your hands immediately with soap
 - Visitors should not be allowed in the home
 - The patient should have separate utensils, dishes, cups, towels and bed sheets. They should be washed well with soap and not shared.
 - Frequently touched surfaces like door handles and tables should be disinfected everyday.
- People with COVID-19 who are being cared for at home should stay in isolation until they are no longer able to spread the virus on to others. This means that:
 - People who show signs of COVID-19 should stay in isolation for at least 10 days after the first day they started to show symptoms
 - People without symptoms should stay in isolation for at least 10 days after testing positive

2. Why do we have to wear face masks if some authorities, military, and police do not wear them?

- The health measures that have been recommended around the world are designed to keep people safe and stop the spread of COVID-19.
- But unfortunately not everyone is following these measures, even people in positions of power like the authorities, military and police.
- However, just because some people are not wearing face masks, doesn't mean you shouldn't either.
- Following measures like wearing a face mask, should not be about avoiding fines, or punishment or simply following what others are doing.
- We should wear a face mask because it will help protect us and our loved ones from catching the virus, or from passing it to other people who are elderly or have a medical condition and are more at risk of getting seriously sick or even dying from COVID-19.
- So we should not wait for others to adopt these measures before we do, we have to take responsibility for our own health even if others might not be doing the same.

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. Are there different kinds of COVID-19 viruses in different countries?

- Many viruses like COVID-19 change all the time. Since December 2019, when the virus was first reported in China, it has travelled all over the world affecting every region. Since then the virus has changed slightly along the way. Meaning that different countries might have slightly different strains of the same virus.

- This is how scientists are able to tell where the infections in a country are coming from. For example, the first case of COVID-19 in Italy was linked to an infection in Germany and other cases from Italy might have also come from Singapore.
- These changes might cause the virus to become more dangerous or less dangerous to humans. But fortunately, it is not common for a virus to change in a way that makes it more dangerous to humans.
- Evidence also shows that these changes happen much slower in coronaviruses than in other viruses. Scientists around the world continue to monitor how COVID-19 is adapting and changing and the effects it has on humans.

4. How can we wash our hands if we don't have clean water?

- The best water to wash our hands with is, clean running water because it less likely to have harmful bacteria, which can make you sick. But many people don't have access to clean drinking water because of drought, local water supplies are contaminated, or the nearest water source is very far away
- If you have access to water but it is a little bit dirty, it is still better to wash your hands with soap than not wash them at all. If you are worried about the bacteria inside the water you there are different things you can do to purify the water to make it safe.
- One of the best ways to kill bacteria, viruses and parasites in water is by boiling it. But before boiling the water, you will need to check if it is cloudy or visibly dirty first.
- If the water is cloudy or dirty:
 - Filter it through a clean cloth or paper towel to remove any dirt
 - Do this as many times as you need until the water is clear
 - Take the clear water and put it inside a pot ready for boiling
 - Heat the water on a stove or above a fire and bring to a boil
 - Once boiling, let it boil for 1-3 minutes (count to 60 or 180 slowly)
 - Let the water cool down
- If the water is clear:
 - Put the water in a pan and bring it to a rolling boil over a stove or fire
 - Once boiling, let it boil for 1-3 minutes (count to 60 or 180 slowly)
 - Let the water cool down
- Once the water has cooled down you can use it for drinking and handwashing, or you can store the boiled water in clean and disinfected containers with tight covers.
- If you have no access to water at all, you can also use ash or sand to wash your hands. This works because the action of scrubbing your hands can help in removing dirt from your hands.
- Both ash and sand have slightly basic pH levels, which means the acidity in the ash or sand can kill bacteria in the hands but it is important to know that it will **not** kill the COVID-19 virus. Only soap or hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol can kill the virus, so only use ash or sand in cases of emergencies.



COVID-19: ASK DR BEN

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- 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 because it is likely to be the most sterile since it was heated at the highest temperature.

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.