



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 people who don't show symptoms transmit the disease?

- Yes, people who are COVID-19 positive can transmit the virus both when they show symptoms and also when they don't show symptoms.
- People who are infected with COVID-19 but don't show any signs of infection are referred to as *asymptomatic* and should not be confused with people who show mild symptoms of COVID-19.
- Truly asymptomatic cases are difficult to identify and the number of cases like this are still not known. That is why it is important that countries continue testing and contact tracing in order to identify all people who are infected with COVID-19.
- People confirmed to have COVID-19 but do not show symptoms of the virus, should self-isolate and limit their contact with others in order to prevent transmission.
- One of the main challenges we face in fighting the COVID-19 outbreak is that there may be many people who have the virus, but don't know it and are accidentally passing it onto people they meet. This is why **all of us** need to adopt key prevention measures like physical distancing, regular hand washing and wearing a face mask in public places – even if we don't think there are people with COVID-19 in our community.

### 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. 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.

## 2. Are animals affected by COVID-19 as well?

- We don't know the exact source of the current COVID-19 outbreak, but what we do know is that it originally came from an animal. The possible animal source of COVID-19 has not yet been confirmed but research is ongoing to determine this.
- There have been cases of animals testing positive for COVID-19 after they had been in contact with infected humans. Research has shown that some animals were able to transmit the infection to other animals of the same species.
- However, there is no significant evidence that these animals can transmit the disease to humans and spread COVID-19. COVID-19 is mainly spread through droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks.
- The true impact that COVID-19 has on animals is not fully understood yet and more research is required but until more is known it is recommended that people who are infected with COVID-19 and people who are at risk of infection limit their contact with animals as well as humans. When handling and caring for animals, basic hygiene measures should always be used, such as washing your hands after touching animals.

## 3. Are people with a certain blood type more or less at risk?

- There is no evidence that you are more or less at risk of catching COVID-19 based on your blood group.
- However, some studies have found that certain blood types are more at risk of developing severe COVID-19 and consequently carry a greater risk of COVID-19 related death. The findings suggested that people with blood type O were less susceptible to severe COVID-19 than other blood groups, whereas people with blood type A had the highest risk of developing serious COVID-19 symptoms.
- More studies are needed to understand better the connection between COVID-19 and different blood groups. As always, the best way to stay safe is by practising the five simple steps to preventing COVID-19 at the bottom of this factsheet.

## 4. What is the Red Cross doing to help stop the spread of the disease?

- Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers are working hard to help communities across Africa prevent, respond to and manage the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- To help prevent the spread of the outbreak, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are:
  - Making sure communities have the information they need about COVID-19 to stay safe, including how it spreads, how to prevent it, symptoms and what to do if you think you might be infected. We are doing this by visiting people in their homes, activities in public places, through radio and TV shows and social media.
  - Providing communities with important items like soap, hand sanitizers, face masks and clean water.
  - Working with community and religious leaders and local groups to help them plan ways to prevent and manage outbreaks of COVID-19 in their community, for example by building handwashing stands with local materials, sewing masks or agreeing the best way to care for people who catch the virus.
  - Listening to and answering people's questions and feedback about COVID-19 so we can provide the information they need, reduce people's fears, correct rumours, and misinformation, and improve the services we provide.
  - Helping communities to spot and isolate cases of COVID-19 quickly before it can spread, by supporting them to set up community referral mechanisms, and to feed into Ministry of Health contact tracing systems.
- Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are also helping to identify, isolate and care for people who have COVID-19. This includes
  - Providing temperature screening in airports, at borders and in public places like markets
  - Supporting the Ministry of Health to carry out COVID-19 testing, tracing of people who have come into contact with someone who has tested positive and to provide quarantine and isolation services.
  - Running community health clinics and providing ambulance services.
  - Providing psycho-social support to communities affected by the outbreak
- To help communities manage the wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are:
  - Providing cash and vouchers to people who have lost their incomes so they can buy food, pay their rent and meet their other basic needs.
  - Helping families to restart their livelihoods or find alternative ways to earn an income.
  - Providing food and other assistance to vulnerable groups like refugees, homeless people, those living in slums and people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.