



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON CORONAVIRUS As at 13 March 2020

PANDEMIC DECLARATION

What does the WHO pandemic declaration mean?

The declaration allows governments to activate preparedness plans and undertake emergency procedures to protect the public, such as travel and trade restrictions.

When is a pandemic declared?

Generally, the WHO will declare a pandemic when there is sustained community outbreaks on different continents.

When was the last global pandemic?

The WHO last declared in 2009 for the H1N1 flu.

What is the difference between an outbreak, epidemic and pandemic?

An outbreak is a sudden rise in cases of a disease in a particular place. An epidemic is a large outbreak. A pandemic means a global epidemic.

Does a pandemic reflect the severity of a disease?

A pandemic has nothing to do with how serious an illness is. It just means a disease is spreading widely and at an alarming rate.

CORONA VIRUS INFORMATION

What can I do to minimise the risk of infection?

The virus is very susceptible to common anti-bacterial cleaning agents such as bleach, and alcohol-based cleaners (60% volume). Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Maintain at least 1 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.

What is self-isolation?

Self-isolation is a way to keep yourself from possibly infecting others if you think you might be infected. It involves limiting contact with public places, relatives, friends, colleagues, and public transport.

I have flu like symptoms, should I get tested?

The symptoms of COVID-19 include *cough, sore throat, shortness of breath* or *fever*. However, these are also symptoms of the flu. The National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) recommends that you should only get tested if you display symptoms plus:

- Been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 person;
- Travelled to a high risk country;
- Worked in or been to a healthcare facility treating people with Covid-19;
- Have a severe case of pneumonia with an unknown cause.

However, one should consult your medical practitioner immediately if you display symptoms.

Where should I go if I want to test for COVID-19?

If you think you might have contracted the virus, you can call the NICD helpline (0800 029 999) and you will be advised on possible testing facilities. However, testing is not routinely done unless testing is indicated by a health professional therefore one would need to be assessed by your medical practitioner in order to qualify for testing.

What happens if I test positive?

Anyone who tests positive will immediately be notified and put into quarantine at home or at a facility designated to manage the outbreak. You will then remain in quarantine until repeat testing shows you no longer have the virus.

How much does the test cost?

Public sector testing is free of charge. Private laboratories such as Lancet, Ampath and Pathcare can also test for SARS-CoV-2. Enquiry should be with the respective laboratory for their costing of the test. If going via a private lab, it is advisable to check with your medical aid to ascertain if they will cover the costs for the test.

How is COVID-19 infection treated?

There is no specific treatment available for SARS-CoV-2. Treatment is supportive (e.g. providing oxygen for patients with shortness of breath or managing a fever). Antibiotics do not treat viral infections. However, antibiotics may be required if a secondary bacterial infection develops. Currently there is a vaccine being developed.

Can I go to school or work?

Anyone who is sick or displaying symptoms should not go to school or work. If you have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, you should self-isolate for 14 days from the date of close contact. If you are concerned, contact your medical practitioner for further advice.

What is the plan of the Department of Basic Education on this matter, what should we do as teachers?

Protocols have been developed and distributed to provinces and districts in the country. However, it is especially important to encourage children and staff to take every day preventative actions to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses. This includes staying at home when sick, washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol and cleaning frequently touched surfaces. If children do become ill, they should be strictly isolated at home. In situations where the child or staff member becomes

sick at school, they should be separated from healthy students and staff until sick students and staff can be sent home.

VIRUS MYTHS

Can the virus spread through food items?

The Coronavirus is spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food it is important to always rinse the food with water and wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety.

Can I get the virus through handling or receiving deliveries of packages or products?

It is possible that one may touch the SARS-CoV-2 virus while handling packages contaminated by the virus however, one may only contract the virus or be affected by it when the virus comes into contact with your mucosal membranes (mouth, tongue or nose) thus entering your body. This is not the main means of transmission. Inhaling respiratory droplets is the main way the virus spreads.

The virus does not survive well on surfaces, therefore there is a lower risk of it spreading from products or packages that are shipped or delivered over a period of time.

Does warm weather kill the virus?

The SARS-CoV-2 virus does not survive well in warmer climates. It is therefore expected to thrive in the colder winter seasons.

Who is at higher risk of getting the virus?

Those at higher risk of contracting the virus include the elderly and individuals with chronic conditions or a compromised immune system. Chronic conditions include high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and lung disease amongst others.

What should I do if I am at higher risk of getting the virus?

If you are at higher risk of getting the virus, you should take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others. When you go out, try to avoid unnecessary contact, non-essential travel and exposure to others who are sick. Wash your hands often, avoid crowds and if there is an outbreak in your community, consider staying home and limiting contact to essential people.

Can my pet get COVID-19?

No. According to the WHO, there is no evidence that companion animals or pets such as cats and dogs have been infected or could spread the virus that causes COVID-19. However, it is good practice to wash your hands after being around animals.

GENERAL INFO

How long does the virus survive on surfaces?

It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary

information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

What should I do if I have recently returned from a country with widespread transmission of the virus?

Self-monitor for any symptom onset such as fever, cough, sore throat or difficulty breathing. If any should arise, seek medical attention. Otherwise practice adequate hygiene and be aware of possible asymptomatic transmission.

What role can I play in the fight against the virus?

Be aware of fake news reporting, ensuring credible resources from the WHO, CDC or NICD are only shared. Speak out against negative behaviours and negative social media statements stereotyping various individuals.

Ensure personal hygiene and good health practices such as cough and sneeze etiquette.

Get the recent flu vaccine to ensure your immune system is at optimal capacity.

Express your appreciation to healthcare workers who are on the frontline taking care of patients and helping make sure this disease does not spread further.