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 **Answers to your frequently asked questions on COVID-19**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Over the past few weeks, our broadcasting partners sent us their most pressing questions about COVID-19. To answer them, we created these frequently asked questions (FAQs), using reputable authorities and verified sources of information such as the World Health Organization.

Here are the answers to some of your FAQs on COVID-19.

*Disclaimer: This resource does not take the place of professional medical advice. If you have specific questions about your well-being, contact your local health authority immediately.*

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### Basic information

**What is COVID-19?**

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered virus. It belongs to the coronavirus family, which includes the common cold.

**Why is it called COVID-19?**

The name COVID-19 comes from “Coronavirus” and “disease,” which are shortened to COVID. The number 19 was added to indicate that the new virus was discovered in 2019. COVID-19 is also commonly called the coronavirus, the novel (meaning newly-discovered) coronavirus, and SARS-CoV-2, its scientific name.

**Where did COVID-19 come from?**

COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, China where it likely came from an animal. Scientists have since conducted studies which confirm that the virus is natural and was not created in a laboratory.

**Why is the current outbreak of COVID-19 called a pandemic?**

In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization because it affects an exceptionally high number of people over a large area of the globe.

**Is every country affected by COVID-19?**

Individuals have been infected and have died from COVID-19 in about 200 countries in the world, including more than 40 African countries. For up-to-date information on the number of COVID-19 cases in each country and related statistics, see: https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries.

**Why is COVID-19 dangerous?**

This virus is dangerous because it spreads quite easily and can have serious health outcomes.

**What is the difference between COVID-19 and SARS?**

The virus that caused Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is in the same coronavirus family as COVID-19. It is harder to spread the virus that causes SARS, but illnesses from SARS are generally more severe.

### Transmission and risk factors

**How is COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 is spread by droplets that are expelled into the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or exhales. Individuals can become infected by coming into contact with these droplets in the air or by touching surfaces on which the droplets land. The most common way that COVID-19 is spread is from person to person.

**How long can droplets causing COVID-19 survive on surfaces?**

Scientists think droplets causing COVID-19 infection can survive on cardboard for less than 24 hours and on plastic or stainless steel for up to two or three days. To help prevent transmission from frequently touched surfaces, regularly clean surfaces with soap and water or a detergent-based cleaner.

**Who is most at-risk for COVID-19?**

Individuals most at-risk for COVID-19 are the elderly and people with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, and cancer, which limit their immune system response. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty also increase the risk of being infected with COVID-19, in part because of lack of resources to ensure proper hygiene. Women are more at risk because they tend to be responsible for taking care of sick family or community members and because they account for a strong majority of health workers.

**Is there a blood type that is more at risk for COVID-19?**

Scientists who are studying this have found no clear relationship between blood type and infection with COVID-19.

**Is it true that COVID-19 kills only the elderly?**

Older people are more likely to become severely ill and die when infected with COVID-19. But people of all ages, including the young, can be infected, become seriously ill, and die from COVID-19. Women and other vulnerable groups may be less able to make decisions to seek care and may be less able to afford health services, both of which increase risk.

### Transmission: Myths and facts

**Can domestic animals be infected with COVID-19 and pass on the virus to humans?**

Tests have shown that a very small number of domestic animals have been infected with COVID-19. But there is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread from animals to humans.

**Can I be infected with COVID-19 through a mosquito bite?**

No. There is no evidence that mosquito bites can transmit the virus to humans.

**Can I be infected with COVID-19 through sexual intercourse?**

Like other forms of physical contact, being closer than one metre to anyone infected with COVID-19 presents a risk for infection.

**Can I be infected with COVID-19 by 5G technology?**

No. Viruses cannot spread on a network, or by radio or television airwaves. COVID-19 is spread from one infected human to another.

### Understanding the symptoms

**What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The major symptoms are fever, coughing, tiredness, and difficulty breathing.

**What is difficulty breathing?**

Shortness of breath is an unexpected feeling of being out of breath. But it is important to remember that this is just one common symptom of COVID-19. If you are having difficulty breathing without other symptoms of COVID-19, your illness could be related to a different health issue. If breathing difficulties persist, call your local health authority.

**What temperature is considered normal for a healthy person?**

A healthy person’s normal temperature ranges from about 36-37 degrees Celsius.

**When do people infected with COVID-19 start to show symptoms?**

The average time between being infected and starting to show symptoms is five to seven days. In a small minority of cases, that period can range up to 14 days. A small percentage of people never show symptoms.

**How do I know if I have COVID-19 and not the cold or flu?**

The only way to positively determine whether you have COVID-19 is through a medical test. But if you have the symptoms of COVID-19 - fever, coughing, tiredness, breathing difficulties - you should self-isolate for 14 days.

**If I have symptoms, should I go to the hospital or call first?**

Always call before going to the hospital. The specific arrangements to care for people with symptoms of COVID-19 and the capacity of local health systems will vary by country - and within countries.

### Recommendations for staying safe and healthy

**How do I protect myself from COVID-19?**

Wash your hands often using soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer, stay at least one metre away from people outside your family, and avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes, and ears.

**Why is handwashing with soap and water important?**

Soap is required to kill COVID-19. Sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can also be used to kill COVID-19 on hands.

**What is self-isolation?**

According to the World Health Organization, individuals should self-isolate for 14 days if they have symptoms of COVID-19, if they have come into contact with someone who is or may be infected with COVID-19, or if they have been told to self-isolate by a public health authority. Self-isolation means staying at home and avoiding public places to prevent infecting others.

**How do I self-isolate?**

Individuals in self-isolation should stay at home and maintain at least one metre of distance between themselves and others, including family members, and monitor for symptoms. If it is not possible to stay in a separate room and use a separate toilet facility, place beds at least one metre apart. Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces with soap and water or a detergent-based cleaner. Avoid sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, eating utensils, and towels with others.

Continue to follow World Health Organization recommendations for staying safe and healthy. Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer. Cover your nose and mouth with your elbow when coughing or sneezing.

### Treatment: Myths and facts

**Is there a treatment or cure for COVID-19?**

No. There is no treatment or cure for COVID-19. People who have symptoms should self-isolate to avoid infecting others. There is no evidence that any of the following can treat, cure, or prevent COVID-19:

* Flu shots
* Alcohol
* Pepper soup
* Vitamin C
* Salt, garlic, or lemon
* Hot drinks such as black tea
* Warm clothing
* Warm temperatures or exposure to sunlight
* Hot baths
* Hydroxychloroquine
* Spraying alcohol or chlorine on the body
* Drinking disinfectant
* Steaming the nose and mouth
* Hand dryers
* Ultraviolet disinfection lamps
* Antibiotics
* Pneumonia vaccines

**Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?**

Not yet. Scientists are trying to develop a vaccine but think that it may be at least 12 to 18 months away. COVID-19 is entirely new to medical science. The process of discovering a cure - which in this case may be a vaccine - requires careful and long-term scientific research.

### Face masks and gloves

**When should I wear a face mask?**

According to the World Health Organization, anyone who has symptoms associated with COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19 can wear a mask to prevent spreading the virus to others. Healthy people caring for people infected with COVID-19 can wear a face mask to minimize the possibility of infection.

**What type of face mask should I wear?**

N-95 medical masks should be reserved for healthcare workers. Everyone else can wear a disposable, one-use-only surgical face mask or a reusable cloth face mask.

**How do I use a face mask safely?**

Before putting on a face mask, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Secure the mask behind your head or ears so that it covers your mouth and nose completely. At the sides, it should fit snugly against the face. Never touch a mask while wearing it and do not re-use disposable masks.

When a disposable mask becomes wet or dirty, dispose of it in a garbage bag or container immediately after removing, and seal the bag or container. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before putting on a dry, clean mask.

Individuals who wear a mask must continue to wash their hands regularly with soap and water, maintain at least one metre of distance between themselves and others, and avoid touching their nose, mouth, eyes, and ears.

**Can I wash and re-use a face mask?**

N-95 masks and disposable surgical masks cannot be re-used. Cloth face masks can be re-used and must be regularly washed with soap and water, then dried thoroughly before re-wearing.

**Should I wear gloves?**

The World Health Organization does not recommend that the average person wear gloves. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based sanitizer is the most effective way to avoid infection from frequently touched surfaces.

If you choose to wear gloves, continue to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes, and ears.

**Will a face mask and gloves protect me from COVID-19?**

There is no guarantee that wearing a face mask and/or gloves will prevent infection. Personal protective equipment like masks are most effective when other preventative measures such as hand washing and physical distancing are respected.

### Understanding recovery

**How long is someone infected with COVID-19 contagious?**

People infected with COVID-19 can be contagious before they start to show symptoms. It is possible that people can continue to be contagious even after they stop having symptoms associated with COVID-19. Scientists are still studying how long this period may be. Before leaving self-isolation, consult your local health authority.

After leaving self-isolation, it is important to continue following World Health Organization recommendations for staying safe and healthy. Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer, stay at least one metre away from people outside your family, and avoid touching your nose, mouth, eyes, and ears.

**How long does it take to recover from COVID-19?**

Individuals with mild cases of COVID-19 typically recover in two to three weeks. More severe cases may last up to six weeks or more.

**Can someone who has recovered from COVID-19 be infected if exposed to the disease again?**

Scientists are studying this, but have not determined whether or not re-infections are possible.

**Can an individual who doesn’t have symptoms be a carrier of COVID-19?**

Yes, it is possible for someone without symptoms to be a carrier of COVID-19.

### Pregnancy, malaria, and previous health conditions

**Can pregnant women spread COVID-19 to their baby before birth?**

Scientists are still studying this question. So far, there is no evidence that a pregnant woman can spread COVID-19 to their baby before birth.

**Should pregnant women infected with COVID-19 breastfeed?**

Right now, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be spread to babies through breastmilk. But, like other forms of contact, breastfeeding poses a risk of infection if the mother is infected with COVID-19 because of the close physical contact between a breastfeeding mother and her baby. Scientists recommend that mothers who are infected with COVID-19 wash their hands with soap and water before breastfeeding and wear a mask over their nose and mouth while doing so. If this is not possible, allow someone who is not infected with COVID-19 to feed the baby.

**Should pregnant women continue to visit the hospital for prenatal care?**

Prenatal visits are important to ensure maternal and fetal health. However, due to COVID-19, many obstetricians are either increasing the interval between visits or encouraging pregnant women to call the hospital. If you have any concerns about your own health or your baby’s health, call your local health provider.

**Should I continue to go to the hospital for malaria or HIV medication?**

At this time, it’s best to call before going the hospital for any reason. Ask your local healthcare workers how to manage any health-related issues during this time.

### Broader impacts of COVID-19

**Can I go to work?**

The World Health Organization recommends staying at home as much as possible to avoid the possibility of infection. For information specific to your country, consult guidelines from your local and national-level authorities.

**How will COVID-19 affect agriculture?**

COVID-19 can severely impact a variety of people and kinds of activities in agriculture. First and foremost, the impacts of stay-at-home restrictions will likely limit the amount and types of food produced and sold. To stay safe, farmers need to maintain a distance of at least one metre between themselves and others when working in the field and practice proper hygiene such as regular hand-washing. The restrictions put in place to address COVID-19 will impact producers, vendors, and others in the food supply chain, but to different degrees.

As the impacts on agriculture and food become clearer over time, farmers and others will likely need to modify their practices. In addition to guidelines by the World Health Organization, follow national level recommendations to stay safe and healthy.

**Does COVID-19 impact women differently?**

Women are at increased risk of being infected by COVID-19 because they are most often responsible for taking care of sick family and community members, and because they account for the majority of healthcare workers.

In emergency situations, women’s workload / burden may increase. They are responsible for working and taking care of school-aged children while schools/child care services are closed, as well as taking care of sick people. As health workers, they may work longer hours, while still being largely responsible for household chores.

There is an increased rate of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, during crises while protection services can be interrupted and when restrictions on movement and stay-at-home policies can create more dangerous home environments for women at risk of domestic violence.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 can fall disproportionally on women. For example, job loss may lead to decisions such as not sending girls to school or child marriage.

Essential health services for women, including sexual and reproductive care, may be impacted in crises, which could result in increased negative health impacts and mortality in childbirth.

### For further information

**Where can I find more information about COVID-19?**

You can find reliable and up-to-date information on the World Health Organization website at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus.

**How do I avoid fake news and misinformation about COVID-19?**

When researching and reporting on COVID-19, use information from reliable organizations such as the World Health Organization. Always check the date of the source to make sure the information is up-to-date. If you are unsure about the information, double check it from another source. For more information on fact-checking and specifically on fact-checking COVID-19 information, visit: https://africacheck.org/reports/live-guide-all-our-coronavirus-fact-checks-in-one-place/.

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