



Western Cape
Government

Health

COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

17 MARCH 2020 (Version 2)

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are large groups of viruses that are common amongst animals. These viruses can make people sick, usually with a mild to moderate upper respiratory tract illness, similar to flu. A new coronavirus called COVID-19 was identified in China and is associated with an outbreak of viral pneumonia.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the new infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Mild to severe respiratory illness with

- fever
- cough – usually dry
- fatigue
- myalgia (sore muscles/ body)
- difficulty breathing

Note that a sore throat and runny nose tend to be less common in COVID-19 than in flu or other upper respiratory tract infections.

When am I considered to have COVID-19?

People will be suspected to have the COVID-19 virus if:

- They have flu-like symptoms and in the last 14 days
- have travelled internationally to an area where COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in the community OR Been in close contact (e.g. face-to-face contact, been in a closed room, transport) with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 OR
- Has a household member or someone at work who has tested positive for COVID-19 OR
- Has worked in a facility where a COVID-19 case/s has been diagnosed and was not wearing personal protective equipment OR
- Has travelled to an area where COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in the community

Affected areas are updated daily by NICD: <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/dailyupdates-of-countries/>

Plain Language Definition: You should suspect you have COVID-19 if you have a flu-like illness and have travelled to an area where COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in the community OR had close contact with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The COVID-19 spreads mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Through close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands. Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands. Because the virus is spread through the air it is important to stay more than 1-2 meters (3-6 feet) away from a person who is sick.

How do I protect myself?

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

- Regularly and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub for at least 20 seconds. Wash hands often, especially before handling food/ after using toilet or coughing/ sneezing.
- Cover your cough or sneeze in the bend of elbow or with a tissue, once used throw away and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wearing a mask is unlikely to protect you if you are well. People who are coughing and sneezing who wear a mask (surgical mask fine, N95 not necessary) are less likely to infect others.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. I have flu-symptoms and have recently travelled, what should I do?

How do I go about getting a test?

Should you develop flu-like symptoms after visiting a country or area where COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in the community OR had close contact with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 stay calm. Remember even if you do have COVID-19 most people have a mild illness.

It's important to seek care in a way that prevents you from spreading it to others:

- If you have access to private healthcare call your general doctor/ local health facility or NICD Hotline on 0800 029 999 or the Provincial Hotline on 021 928 4102. Explain your symptoms and where you have travelled or with whom you have had contact.
- If you use public healthcare call your local health facility or NICD Hotline on 0800 029 999 or the Provincial Hotline on 021 928 4102. You will receive advice on what to do. If you are unable to make a call, go to your local facility. Before you enter the facility alert staff that you are concerned you have COVID-19. Expect to be asked to put on a face mask. You will be asked to wait separately from other patients until a health worker can help you.

Should you develop difficulty breathing seek care urgently. If possible, call ahead to your local health facility to inform them you are en route.

How likely am I to catch COVID-19?

The risk depends on where you are - and more specifically, whether there is a COVID-19 outbreak unfolding there. Currently, in South Africa, (as at 16 March 2020) 16 confirmed cases have been reported in the Western Cape. It is important to stay informed of where the virus has been confirmed internationally and locally. You can do so by checking the NICD website which is updated daily: <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/daily-updates-of-countries/>

Should I worry about COVID-19?

Illness due to COVID-19 infection is generally mild in 4 out of 5 cases. Cases in children and young adults are rare. However, it can cause serious illness, particularly amongst the elderly and patients with underlying health conditions. It is therefore quite normal for people to worry about how a COVID-19 outbreak will affect them and their loved ones.

We can channel our concerns into actions to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. First and foremost among these actions is regular and thorough hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene. Secondly, keep informed and follow the advice of the local health authorities including any restrictions put in place on travel, movement and gatherings.

Who is at risk of developing severe illness?

While we are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as lung disease, heart disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

Is there a vaccine, drug or treatment for COVID-19?

Not yet. To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-2019. However, those affected would receive appropriate care to relieve symptoms.

Are antibiotics effective in preventing or treating the COVID-19?

No. Antibiotics do not work against viruses, they only work on bacterial infections. COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so antibiotics do not work. Antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment of COVID-19. They should only be used as directed by a physician to treat a bacterial infection.

Should I wear a mask to protect myself?

Only wear a mask if you are ill with COVID-19 symptoms (especially coughing) or looking after someone who may have COVID-19. Disposable face masks can only be used once. The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently wash your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1-2 meters (3-6 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.

What is the incubation period for COVID-19 and how long is it?

The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days.

What does it mean to isolate yourself?

A public health doctor will ask you to isolate yourself if they suspect you may have COVID-19. This could be before you get tested for the virus or while you wait for test results. This means staying indoors and completely avoiding contact with other people for 14 days. This is to stop the virus from spreading while results are being awaited. If you do not yet show symptoms you will be asked to isolate yourself at home but once tests return positive you will be admitted to an isolation ward. It is very important that you follow instructions about isolating yourself from healthcare practitioners. They will explain this to you.

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 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. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

My family members or employees are returning from an area where COVID-19 has been confirmed. What should they do?

Upon arrival in South Africa travelers returning from affected areas are required to complete a questionnaire and undergo temperature screening. As a precaution, even if they do not display symptoms, they will be requested to isolate themselves - this will be explained by officials. If they meet the criteria (flu-like symptoms and contact with an area where the virus is confirmed or came into contact with someone who has the virus) they will be assessed and taken to the designated hospital for further management. Passing this screening does not mean you might not be infected with COVID-19. You may be infected but not yet showing symptoms. Travelers who are not showing symptoms will be asked to self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days, which is in line with national and international protocols. If symptoms occur during this period, such as fever, or cough or difficulty breathing, travelers are advised NOT to go to their nearest health facility or their general practitioner. When unsure of your status and procedures, and to avoid spreading the disease call the NICD Hotline on 0800 029 999 or the Provincial Hotline on 021 021 928 4102. You will get advice on what to do.

What is the Western Cape doing to prepare for the virus?

- We are working with our national partners to make sure that we are prepared.
- Procedures are in place for case detection, isolation and management for quick diagnosis to be made.
- All health facilities are able to manage suspected or confirmed cases and refer to the appropriate referral or designated hospital.
- Protocols are in place for follow up of case contacts to ensure that the virus does not spread.

Will events be cancelled in the Western Cape?

The President has declared the COVID-19 a national state of disaster and also announced several response measures to limit the spread of the virus. The measures announced by the president include a ban on public gatherings of more than 100 people, and a travel ban for foreign nationals from severely affected countries - Italy, Iraq, South Korea, Spain, Germany, United States, United Kingdom and China - from 18 March 2020.

What measures should I follow?

Gatherings of more than 100 people will be prohibited.

Mass celebrations of upcoming national days such as Human Rights Day and other large government events will be cancelled.

Where small gatherings are unavoidable, organisers will need to put in place stringent measures of prevention and control.

Management of malls, entertainment centres and other places frequented by large numbers of people are requested to intensify their hygiene control.

I am planning on going overseas. What should I do to remain safe?

South African citizens are advised to refrain from all forms of travel to or through the European Union, United States, United Kingdom and other identified high-risk countries such as China, Iran and South Korea.

South African citizens returning from any international area must isolate themselves for 14 days.

Avoid non-essential travel to affected areas if you are sick, in particular for elderly travelers and people with chronic diseases or underlying health conditions. General recommendations for personal hygiene, cough etiquette and keeping a distance of at least one metre from persons showing symptoms remain particularly important for all travelers.

Getting your workplace ready

All sections of our society – including businesses and employers – must play a role in stopping the spread of this disease.

Where possible, employers can consider allowing employees to work from home.

Employers must ensure the workplaces are clean and hygienic and surfaces (e.g. desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly.

Make available soap and/or hand sanitizers thorough hand-washing by employees, contractors and customers. It is advisable to delay or avoid non-essential travel to affected areas if you are sick, in particular for elderly travelers and people with chronic diseases or underlying health conditions.

If you cannot delay traveling, ensure that employees comply with instructions from local authorities where they are traveling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your employees should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings in the area they are traveling to.

Who can I contact if I am unsure or need more information?

Contact the Public Hotline on 0800 029 999.

Provincial Hotline on 021 021 928 4102

It operates 24 hours per day.

Send an email to doh.dismed@westerncape.gov.za

Send "Hi" to 060 012 3456 on Whatsapp



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