

## **Novel coronavirus – what are the facts ?**

Novel coronavirus has become a household theme of discussion as well as a feature in most news items especially since the World Health Organisation has declared the coronavirus outbreak a global public health emergency of international concern on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020. As cases continue to increase and more deaths are confirmed, all countries continue to invest in preparedness and response measures with emphasis on reducing human infection, prevention of secondary transmission and international spread.

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that range from the common cold to Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The current novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak is making major headlines however it is also being accompanied by several myths and misleading information leading to anxiety in the general public. Here are few myths about this virus.

### **The influenza vaccine can prevent coronavirus- False**

The influenza vaccine protects against influenza virus. Coronavirus is another family of viruses which is different from influenza so the vaccine will not protect against coronavirus. There is no vaccine for coronavirus yet. Scientists are still trying to develop a vaccine which can work against the virus. If you haven't taken the influenza vaccine it is still important to take it as influenza is currently at the peak.

### **Natural remedies can treat coronavirus - False**

Many have seen various social media posts which claim that natural remedies like gargling with salt water, eating garlic cloves or having some Chinese medicines as possible treatment options for coronavirus. However, this is not correct. There is no evidence that using mouthwash will protect you from infection with the new coronavirus. Some brands or mouthwash can eliminate certain microbes for a few minutes in the saliva in your mouth. However, this does not mean they protect you from coronavirus infection. Garlic is a healthy food that may have some antimicrobial properties. However, there is no evidence from the current outbreak that eating garlic has protected people from the new coronavirus.

Currently, there is no treatment available for coronavirus. Treatment is only supportive for this virus, and viral infections have their own course and subside on their own. From the information available 98% of people recover. Some specific treatments are under investigation, and will be tested through clinical trials.

### **Healthy individuals are not at the risk - False**

Many people believe that only those individuals with a weak immune system or with other respiratory conditions only are at risk of getting infected with coronavirus. In fact, everyone is at equal risk, even healthy individuals. Hence, it is important every individual protects him or herself by taking the necessary precautionary measures. People who are elderly or have chronic diseases are more at risk of getting complications if they get infected with novel coronavirus.

### **Transmission occurred from bat soup- False**

A video of a young woman eating bat soup is going viral on social media claiming that consumption of bat soup is the cause of this outbreak. This is not correct. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats and bats. We know that through a natural phenomenon, viruses jump from animals to humans. This is called a “spillover” when the virus is passed from animal to human. This occurs through close human-to-animal contact, especially in markets where live and dead animals are sold . The virus then mutates to be able to affect humans and become transmissible from human-to-human. The exact source of novel coronavirus is still not confirmed.

### **Surgical masks can prevent the virus from spreading – what are the facts?**

Surgical masks do not have a perfect airtight seal from the outside and most surgical masks do not have air filters as well. Though a mask will reduce the chance of catching the virus, there is still a good chance. It is better to wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use alcohol based rubs/wipes.

### **If one has a temperature or a cold, then he has the virus - what are the facts?**

Currently we are at the peak of influenza and various common colds. These have very similar symptoms to novel coronavirus. If a person has not visited a country where there is sustained transmission of novel coronavirus, that is China then, probably one has the flu or a common cold.

### **I will die if I am diagnosed with Coronavirus - what are the facts?**

Until now, most coronavirus deaths have only occurred in China. However, things may change as the virus spreads. Coronavirus causes pneumonia. Around 10% of people infected by the SARS coronavirus between 2002-2003 had died. As of now, around 2% of people infected by the novel coronavirus have died because of it. Most of those people were in the age group 40-60 years.

### **I can get the virus if I touch an infected person - what are the facts?**

The virus spreads through "close contact." Very light and accidental touching will not cause the spread of the virus. However, droplets from cough and exhale can easily cause the spread of the virus. Maintain 2 metres distance from people that are sick/coughing, especially those that travelled recently.

### **Pets at home can spread the novel coronavirus - False**

At present, there is no evidence that companion animals/pets such as dogs or cats can be infected with the new coronavirus. However, it is always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets. This protects you against various common bacteria such as E.coli and Salmonella that can pass between pets and humans.

### **Antibiotics can treat novel coronavirus? False**

Antibiotics do not work against viruses. Antibiotics are only effective for bacteria. The new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means

of prevention or treatment. However, if a patient needs hospitalisation for the 2019-nCoV, you may receive antibiotics because bacterial co-infection is possible.

It's human nature to fill a lack of information with stories to make sense of the situation however it is important to seek reputable sources of information to avoid panic and rumours. .

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the World Health Organization's director-general, advised at a recent news conference that: "We're all in this together and we can only stop it together. This is the time for facts, not fear. This is the time for science, not rumors. This is the time for solidarity, not stigma."

*Prof Charmaine Gauci, Superintendent of Public Health*



**Can pets at home spread the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?**

At present, there is **no evidence that companion animals / pets such as dogs or cats can be infected with the new coronavirus.** However, it is always a good idea to **wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets.** This protects you against various common bacteria such as E. coli and Salmonella that can pass between pets and humans.



World Health Organization **#Coronavirus**

No. Vaccines against pneumonia, such as pneumococcal vaccine and Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib) vaccine, do not provide protection against the new coronavirus.

The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Researchers are trying to develop a vaccine against 2019-nCoV, and WHO is supporting their efforts.

Although these vaccines are not effective against 2019-nCoV, vaccination against respiratory illnesses is highly recommended to protect your health.

## Do vaccines against pneumonia protect you against the new coronavirus?



#2019nCoV

No. There is no evidence that regularly rinsing the nose with saline has protected people from infection with the new coronavirus.

There is some limited evidence that regularly rinsing the nose with saline can help people recover more quickly from the common cold. However, regularly rinsing the nose has not been shown to prevent respiratory infections.

## Can regularly rinsing your nose with saline help prevent infection with the new coronavirus?



#2019nCoV

No. There is no evidence that using mouthwash will protect you from infection with the new coronavirus. Some brands of mouthwash can eliminate certain microbes for a few minutes in the saliva in your mouth. However, this does not mean they protect you from 2019-nCoV infection.

## Can gargling mouthwash protect you from infection with the new coronavirus?



#2019nCoV

Garlic is a healthy food that may have some antimicrobial properties. However, there is no evidence from the current outbreak that eating garlic has protected people from the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Can eating garlic help prevent infection with the new coronavirus?



#2019nCoV

No. Sesame oil does not kill the new coronavirus.

There are some chemical disinfectants that can kill the 2019-nCoV on surfaces. These include bleach/chlorine-based disinfectants, ether solvents, 75% ethanol, peracetic acid and chloroform.

However, they have little or no impact on the virus if you put them on the skin or under your nose. It can even be dangerous to put these chemicals on your skin.

Does putting on sesame oil block the new coronavirus from entering the body?



#2019nCoV

People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus (nCoV-2019).

Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.

WHO advise people of all age to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, for example by following good hand hygiene and good respiratory hygiene.

Does the new coronavirus affect older people, or are younger people also susceptible?



#Coronavirus

No, antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria.

The new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment.

However, if you are hospitalized for the 2019-nCoV, you may receive antibiotics since bacterial co-infection is possible.



#Coronavirus

## Are antibiotics effective in preventing and treating the new coronavirus?



To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

However, those infected with the virus should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe illness should receive optimized supportive care.

Some specific treatments are under investigation, and will be tested through clinical trials.

WHO is helping to accelerate research and development efforts with a range of partners.



#Coronavirus

## Are there any specific medicines to prevent or treat the new coronavirus?

