

Novel coronavirus (COVID19) – 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 30th 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. Scientists are still trying to develop a vaccine which can work against the virus.

Natural remedies can treat coronavirus - FALSE

Many have seen various social media posts which claim that natural remedies like gargling with saltwater, 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 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 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 are being 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 himself 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.

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.

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.