



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

WHAT ARE CORONAVIRUSES?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Coronaviruses cause infection in humans and a variety of animals including birds and mammals such as camels, cats and bats. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, which means they can transmit between animals and humans.

WHAT IS A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS? WHAT IS THE 2019-NCOV VIRUS?

A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. Outbreaks of novel virus infections among people are always of public health concern, especially when there is little knowledge about the characteristics of the virus, how it spreads between people, the severity of the resulting infections and how to treat them.

WHAT IS COVID-19

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease-19) is the official name assigned to the novel coronavirus disease under commonly agreed guidelines between WHO, the World Organisation for Animal Health, and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN. It was earlier being called 2019-nCoV.

HOW IS THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS SPREAD?

Coronavirus experts are of the understanding that the novel coronavirus originated in an animal species (such as bats) in China and then spread to humans. The WHO has confirmed that the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) can be spread by human-to-human transmission but it is not yet understood how easily this happens.

Some coronaviruses can be transmitted after close contact with an infected patient, for example, in a household workplace, or health care centre. They spread from person to person through contaminated droplets from a person who is sick with the illness (through coughing or sneezing) or contaminated hands. Viruses can also be present on touched objects and surfaces.



HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM INFECTED WITH THE NEW CORONAVIRUS?

At present, individuals with history of travel to affected areas or who have been in contact with infected cases in other countries are at risk of being infected.

Common signs of infection include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Milder cases may resemble the flu or a bad cold, making detection difficult. For those with a weakened immune system and the elderly, the virus could cause a much more serious respiratory tract illness, such as pneumonia or bronchitis.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THIS CORONAVIRUS INFECTION?

The most common symptoms are fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia with severe acute respiratory distress.

HOW LONG DO SYMPTOMS TAKE TO PRESENT?

It is unknown at this stage, but most likely between two and 14 days.

I HAVE SYMPTOMS. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you have travelled to affected areas with ongoing transmission of coronavirus in the past 14 days and develop a fever, cough and/or shortness of breath, please stay at home, contact your doctor and contact the Public Health team on (+356) 21324086/111 for further advice and guidance.

Do not go to clinics or casualty. Avoid social contact with others, keeping a physical distance of at least 1metre, and practice simple hygiene by covering your mouth when coughing and sneezing and washing your hands frequently.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I COME INTO CONTACT WITH A PERSON WHO I THINK HAS RETURNED TO MALTA RECENTLY FROM AN AFFECTED AREA?

If you have no symptoms of infection, there is no need to take any extra precautions. As it is currently the flu season it is nevertheless advisable to practice good hand hygiene, covering your mouth when coughing and sneezing and avoiding close contact with anyone showing signs of respiratory illness.



If you have any symptoms of respiratory disease including fever, shortness of breath or cough, contact Public Health authorities on (+356) 21324086/111 for advice and guidance.

IS THERE A VACCINE TO PROTECT FROM THIS INFECTION?

As this is a newly detected virus there are no available vaccines that protect against this virus yet.

Arrangements to manage emerging infectious diseases are in place. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available.

I HAVE A HOLIDAY / WORK TRIP TO AN AREA AFFECTED. SHOULD I CANCEL MY TRIP?

The Health Authorities are advising people to limit non essential travel to areas/countries with local transmission of coronavirus.

Travellers still planning to visit any affected area should:

1. Adhere to good hand and food hygiene.
2. Avoid contact with sick persons, in particular with respiratory symptoms.
3. Avoid visiting wet markets or places where live or dead animals are handled.
4. Avoid contact with animals, their excretions or droppings.

Travellers with fever or respiratory symptoms within 14 days of visiting an affected area are advised to contact their doctor by phone and indicate their travel history to affected areas and contact the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit on (+356) 21324086/111.

If you are heading overseas to destinations which may have been affected, and have any other question please call the helpline (+356) 21324086/111.

CAN I STILL EAT CHINESE FOOD?

The coronavirus is not transmitted through food. Thus, it is safe to eat Chinese food. It is always advised to practise good food hygiene and ensure the food is well cooked to avoid the risk of food poisoning

IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE A LETTER OR PACKAGE FROM ABROAD?



Yes it is safe. People receiving packages from China or other regions are not at risk of contracting the new coronavirus. From previous analysis, we know coronaviruses do not survive long on objects such as letters or packages.

HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF, FRIENDS AND FAMILY?

When visiting areas with ongoing transmission of coronavirus, you should:

- I. Avoid contact with sick people, those with a cough;
- II. Avoid visiting markets and places where live or dead animals are handled;
- III. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and if not available, use alcohol-based hand disinfectant regularly
- IV. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or inner side of flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- V. DO NOT sneeze or cough into your hands as you may contaminate objects or people that you touch.
- VI. Dispose of used tissues immediately in bins; Do NOT leave tissues running around
- VII. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth before washing your hands
- VIII. Keep a distance of 1 metre, when talking to someone who is sick

HOW TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF GERMS?

- I. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and if not available, use alcohol-based hand disinfectant regularly
- II. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or inner side of flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- III. DO NOT sneeze or cough into your hands as you may contaminate objects or people that you touch.
- IV. Dispose of used tissues immediately in bins; Do NOT leave tissues running around
- V. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth before washing your hands
- VI. Keep a distance of 1 metre, when talking to someone who is sick

SHOULD I WEAR FACEMASKS?

In Malta, there is no need to wear facemasks. Facemasks help people, who are already infected with the virus, from spreading it to others. Facemasks have not been found to be effective in protecting those who are not infected.

AM I PROTECTED AGAINST 2019-NCOV IF I HAD THE INFLUENZA VACCINE THIS YEAR?

Influenza and novel coronavirus (nCoV) are two very different viruses and the seasonal influenza vaccine would not protect against disease caused by 2019-nCoV. However, as the European influenza season is still underway, the influenza vaccine is the best available protection against seasonal influenza.



HOW SHOULD I CLEAN SURFACES TO PREVENT SPREAD OF GERMS?

We recommend performing routine environmental cleaning:

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. Some example of frequently used disinfectants are 70% ethanol and products containing sodium hypochlorite (contained in the household bleach).
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.