



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

WHAT IS CORONAVIRUS?

Coronaviruses are viruses which cause respiratory symptoms ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). They are a family of viruses which are present both in humans and in animals.

They are spread from one person to another through:

1. Coughing and sneezing (via droplets)
2. Hands which have become contaminated with the virus after touching contaminated surfaces or
3. Through direct contact with a person infected with the coronavirus (such as caring for a sick person)

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

From the information known to date, the common symptoms are one or more of the below:

1. Fever,
2. Cough,
3. Shortness of breath.

Other symptoms may include:

1. Tiredness
2. Sore throat
3. Runny / blocked nose
4. Headache
5. Muscle pain
6. Loss of smell
7. Loss of taste
8. Diarrhoea or vomiting

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE SYMPTOMS?

If you have any of the above symptoms, please stay at home and call the **Public Health helpline on 111**.

If you have symptoms of respiratory illness like cough, contact your GP or Health Centre. **Avoid social contact with others, keeping a physical distance of at least 2 metres, and practice simple hygiene by covering your mouth when coughing and sneezing and washing your hands frequently.**

If you have severe symptoms such as severe shortness of breath, call 112 immediately.



HOW SEVERE IS THE INFECTION?

It is generally mild, especially for children and young people, but may also result in requirement of medical care and hospitalisation. In some cases, the infection can cause severe pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome that can lead to death.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR SYMPTOMS TO DEVELOP?

The incubation period, time between contamination and the appearance of the first symptoms can take between 2 to 14 days. **How is COVID-19 coronavirus spread?**

The COVID-19 infection is transmitted by people carrying the virus. The disease can be spread from person to person through respiratory droplets expelled from the nose or mouth when a person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can persist for a few hours on objects or surfaces around the person in question. An infection with COVID-19 can occur if you touch these objects or surfaces and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth. COVID-19 can also be contracted by inhaling droplets from a sick person who has just coughed or sneezed. Therefore, it is important to keep a distance of more than two meters from a sick person and to respect basic hygiene measures.

IS THERE A TREATMENT OR A VACCINE?

No specific treatment exists. Treatment given by a medical doctor is to control the symptoms. There are currently no vaccines against coronaviruses, including 2019-nCoV. Therefore, it is very important to prevent infection or contain further spread of an infection. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available.

WHO IS AT HIGHER RISK?

Though no one is immune, older adults are at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID 19. In addition, anyone with an underlying medical condition, regardless of their age, faces increased risk of serious illness.

Vulnerable groups must stay at home & cannot go to work. These include:

- ✓Elderly over 65 years
- ✓Insulin dependent diabetics
- ✓Those Taking Biologicals (medicines for long-term medical conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, Psoriasis, ankylosing spondylitis)
- ✓Patients with cancer and who have undergone chemotherapy in the last 6 months
- ✓Patients who are immunosuppressed including those who had a transplant and those with HIV



- ✓Patients undergoing dialysis
- ✓Pregnant women
- ✓Patients with Respiratory problems (have been hospitalized in the last 1 year)
- ✓Patients with Cardiac problems and had interventions in the last 6 months
- ✓Patients who attend the Heart failure clinic
- ✓Patients on Oral steroids

These persons can go out **ONLY** for essential things like to get groceries and medicine. Outings and contact with others should be limited as much as possible.

CAN I ORDER TAKE AWAY FOOD?

The coronavirus is not transmitted through food. There is a risk that there could be contamination of the food packaging with the virus. It is advisable that you remove the food from its disposable outer packaging and heat it thoroughly prior to consuming it. Finally, always wash your hands properly before starting to eat.

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

It is known that coronavirus can survive on different surfaces for a few hours to a few days. It is advisable to put aside the package or parcel for a few days unless you need the contents urgently. If you do, make sure you wash your hands very well after handling it.

I BELIEVE I HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS THE VIRUS, DOES THIS MEAN I NEED TO BE TESTED?

Public health authorities follow contact tracing procedures to identify and contact all possible close contacts. A risk assessment is done for each contact according to type and duration of contact; each case is different. Public Health Authorities will advise you if you need to be tested. You are advised to self monitor for symptoms. If symptoms develop please call the Public Health Helpline 111.

HOW DO I BOOK AN APPOINTMENT?

Swab tests are done at the testing centres **ONLY** by appointment.

To book your swab test call the Public Health Helpline on 111 or +356 21324086 if you have a foreign number. The operators will take note of your personal details and you will be given an appointment to undergo this test closest to your place of residence.

There are 4 testing centres, one at Pembroke, one at Luqa, one at Mater Dei Hospital (for health care professionals) and one in Xewkija, Gozo.



You will receive an email confirming your appointment date, time and location.

WHEN WILL I BE NOTIFIED OF THE RESULTS?

Public Health provides results by email, SMS or a landline phone call within 72 hours, when accurate contact data is provided. If any of the data provided to Public Health is inaccurate, the result may not arrive. If 72 hours elapse and you have not received the result, you may send an email to covid19.followup@gov.mt or, if you don't have an email address, call 111.

The results are also being released to patients through the myHealth portal. All Maltese citizens and residents aged 14+ can access myHealth by going to www.myhealth.gov.mt and logging in using their ID card number (or residence permit number) and their e-ID password. Persons who had an e-ID password but need a new one, and persons who have never had an e-ID password will find helpful links after clicking on 'Log in with your e-ID'. Access to records of children aged below 14 is only possible for doctors linked to the children through myHealth. Queries related to myHealth may be sent to myhealth@gov.mt.

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

HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS FROM CORONAVIRUS?

1. **STAY AT HOME**, avoid going out unnecessarily, avoid all kinds of social gatherings, maintain a distance of 2 metres from others
2. **CLEAN**: Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and if not available, use alcohol-based hand disinfectant.
3. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or inner side of flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing.
4. **DO NOT** sneeze or cough into your hands as you may contaminate objects or people that you touch.
5. Dispose of used tissues immediately in lined and closed bins; **DO NOT** leave tissues running around.
6. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth before washing your hands.
7. Keep a minimum of two metre distance when talking to someone who is sick.
8. Avoid all handshakes
9. If you are sick (with any illness) **STAY AT HOME**, even if your symptoms are mild.
10. If you are in quarantine, respect the quarantine order and the advice of Public Health Authorities.
11. If you are elderly or vulnerable, stay at home. If you have elderly or vulnerable relatives, don't visit them. Instead offer them support by taking groceries to them or other necessities or helping them to organise deliveries.
12. Follow guidance from health authorities. Keep up to date and refer to reliable sources of information. Avoid spreading misinformation and 'fake news' which only serves to cause panic and create further challenges for healthcare services.



SHOULD I WEAR FACEMASKS?

With the lifting of certain restrictive public health measures instituted as part of the COVID19 Public Health Response, the Public Health Authorities are advising on the benefits of wearing a face mask or visor by individuals who are not ill, when entering closed spaces. Customers and staff in retail outlets and on public transport are required to wear a mask or a visor. Visors can be worn alone or together with a mask. Persons visiting banks are advised to wear a visor, since masks are not permitted for security reasons. It is the responsibility of employers to provide appropriate masks or visors for their workers. The use of face masks helps reduce the spread of infection in the community by limiting the spread of infection from infected individuals who may not know they are infected, who have not yet developed symptoms or who remain asymptomatic. The wearing of masks will therefore enhance the effects of physical distancing. It is important to note that face covers are not meant to be a replacement for physical distancing; observing cough and sneeze etiquette; maintaining meticulous hand hygiene and avoiding touching one's face.

AM I PROTECTED AGAINST COVID-19 IF I HAD THE INFLUENZA VACCINE THIS YEAR?

Influenza and COVID19 are two very different viruses and the seasonal influenza vaccine would not protect against disease caused by COVID 19. However, 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 examples 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.

I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT FOR THE SWAB TEST BUT I HAVE HEARD THAT IT IS UNCOMFORTABLE. CAN I CANCEL MY APPOINTMENT?

While the test is not compulsory it is NOT recommended for you to cancel your appointment. The swab test can be uncomfortable, but it only lasts a few seconds and it is the only way to know for sure whether you have the infection or not. This is important not only for yourself, but also for any vulnerable people you may encounter who might suffer severe consequences if they become infected with coronavirus. It is still recommended that anybody with symptoms, even mild ones, should isolate himself/herself until he/she has been free from symptoms for 24 hours.



IF I HAD TESTED POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS AND HAVE NOW RECOVERED, CAN I GET INFECTED AGAIN?

There is still insufficient evidence about whether people who have recovered from infection with Covid-19 develop long-lasting immunity or not. It is therefore advisable that even though you have recovered from the coronavirus infection you should still observe all recommendations about hand hygiene and social distancing. You should also contact a doctor (by phone) or 111 should you once again develop symptoms of this virus as you may need to have the swab test done again.

MY NEIGHBOR HAD COVID-19 INFECTION AND HAS NOW COME OUT OF QUARANTINE. SHOULD I BE WORRIED/KEEP AWAY FROM HIM? WHERE CAN I CHECK THAT HE HAS REALLY RECOVERED?

If your neighbour has been given a clean bill of health by the Public Health Authorities and told that he no longer needs to stay in quarantine, then you can rest assured that he poses no public health risk to you or the general public. You therefore do not need to take any precautions other than those being recommended in general, to all, with regards to hand hygiene and social distancing.

The Health Department will not reveal any information about private individuals to others without their consent. You therefore cannot check whether somebody else has had the infection or has recovered from it. However, there are enforcement officers checking regularly on people who are in mandatory quarantine because they resulted positive for Covid-19, and they will be aware if somebody is not observing this quarantine and issue fines accordingly.

NOW THAT VERY FEW NEW CASES OF COVID-19 ARE BEING DIAGNOSED DAILY, IS IT SAFE TO GO OUT MORE OFTEN?

While it is reassuring that the number of new cases being diagnosed has decreased drastically it is still too early to start relaxing the measures recommended by the authorities to ensure social distancing and, especially, protection of the elderly and vulnerable. The authorities will be reviewing the situation regularly and acting accordingly. For the time being it is better that the general public continues self-isolating and observing social distancing measures.