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The lowdown on COVID-19 otherwise known as the novel coronavirus

2020

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As you will no doubt be aware, there is currently an outbreak of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) originating in China, which is raising global concern as it continues to spread across the world.

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions and answers about the virus, which we hope will put your mind at rest.

What exactly is this virus, and are we as South Africans at risk?

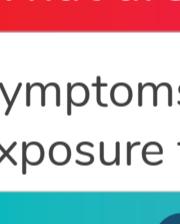
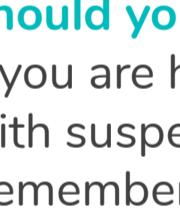
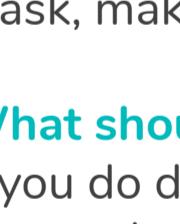
Coronaviruses belong to a large family of viruses that include the MERS and SARS viruses, and can cause a wide spectrum of respiratory illnesses. Although the virus is contagious and may be potentially life threatening in a few people, the risk of contracting it in South Africa is currently low, with no cases having been confirmed in this country at this time.

How is the virus spread?

The COVID-19 virus is spread in a similar way to influenza (flu) viruses, which is through:

- Direct contact with other infected people.
- Droplets generated through coughs or sneezes.
- Contact with infected surfaces such as tabletops and shared objects like utensils etc.
- Faecal-oral contact.

What measures can you take to avoid being infected?

	Wash your hands often and well with water and soap or other disinfectants, especially after coughing and sneezing, using toilets, before handling or preparing food, and after contact with sick people.
	Avoid contact with infected people and use face masks if visiting sick relatives.
	Avoid touching your eyes, and/or nose as much as possible.
	Use a tissue when sneezing or coughing and then get rid of the tissue in a bin. Always wash your hands afterwards. If there is no tissue it is advisable to cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, and not your hands.
	Maintain good hygiene habits and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

What are the most common signs and symptoms of the virus?

Symptoms may appear in as little as two days, or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms of infection may include:

	Coughing		Fever		Congestion of the nose and throat		Shortness of breath
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Should you use a mask?

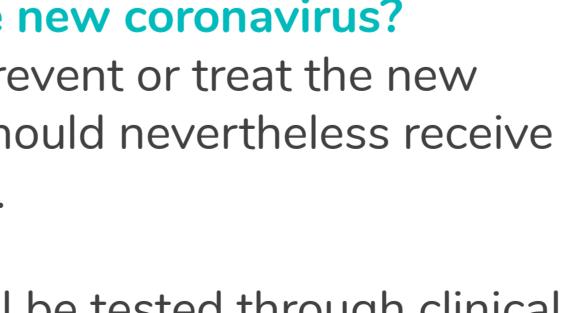
If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection, or if you are coughing and/or sneezing. Remember that masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub, or soap and water. If you do wear a mask, make sure you know how to use it and always dispose of it properly.

What should you do if you develop signs and symptoms?

If you do develop respiratory illness symptoms, visit your healthcare provider and ensure that you disclose your full travel history to them. Your healthcare provider

will advise you if you should be tested for the novel coronavirus.

Should you develop symptoms of an acute respiratory illness before, during or after travel, you are encouraged to seek medical attention and share your travel history with your healthcare provider.



Do vaccines against pneumonia protect you against the new coronavirus?

No, vaccines against flu and/or pneumonia, such as a pneumococcal vaccine, do not provide protection against the new coronavirus.

Is it safe to receive a letter or a package from China?

Yes, it is safe. People receiving packages from China 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.

Some specific treatments are under investigation and will be tested through clinical trials. The World Health Organization (WHO) is helping to accelerate research in this area.