

COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)

IN OUR LIVES



1. WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 stands for Coronavirus Disease 2019. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. The virus is also sometimes called the novel coronavirus or the COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 can cause a variety of symptoms. The main ones are fever, sore throat and shortness of breath. In serious cases COVID-19 can cause serious problems in a person's lungs and people can die of pneumonia.



2. WHO GETS COVID-19?

Anyone can get infected with the COVID-19 virus. Because it is such a new virus, nobody's immune system knows the virus yet. It takes time for our bodies to recognise this new virus and to start fighting it effectively. Most people's bodies however eventually win the fight against the virus.

Children can get infected, but it is rare for children to get very sick with COVID-19. The older you are, the more likely it is that the virus will make you very sick, and potentially kill you.

People with underlying conditions like heart disease or diabetes are at higher risk of getting sick from COVID-19.

We don't yet know what the impact of HIV and TB is on COVID-19 risk, but experts suspect that people living with HIV who are not taking ARVs will be at higher risk of getting sick from COVID-19.



3. HOW IS COVID-19 TRANSMITTED?

The COVID-19 virus is transmitted in droplets when someone coughs, sneezes or in saliva. The virus can live for some hours on various surfaces. It may hang in the air for short periods, but as far as we know it usually falls to the ground quite quickly and most transmission is not through the air.

The virus enters the body through the mouth, nose or eyes.

You may for example contract the virus if someone coughs in your face, or if someone coughs and some of the droplets from the cough falls on your hand and you then touch your face. You might also contract the virus by touching a door handle if someone with the virus touched that door handle after touching their mouth.



4. HOW IS COVID-19 DIAGNOSED?

The most commonly used COVID-19 test is done by taking a swab from your nose or the back of your throat. This is then sent to a laboratory where it is tested for the COVID-19 virus. The type of test used is a PCR test. This works similarly to HIV PCR tests. These tests look for parts of the virus rather than for antibodies.

There is some talk that tests that look for antibodies will soon be introduced as well. The disadvantage of antibody tests is that they can only pick up COVID-19 infection once the infection has spread to the extent that your body is making antibodies.



5. IS THERE A TREATMENT OR A CURE FOR COVID-19?

Currently there is no effective treatment, cure or vaccine for COVID-19. There are, however, a number of clinical trials underway in which different medicines are being tested. One of the most important trials (called SOLIDARITY) is testing four different potential treatments. The SOLIDARITY trial is being conducted in more than 10 countries, including South Africa.

There is no evidence that vitamins or any supplements or alternative treatments can treat or cure COVID-19. As with HIV, we should not be misled by people attempting to exploit our desperation by selling us unproven treatments.



6. WHAT IF I AM LIVING WITH HIV?

If you are living with HIV the most important thing you can do to protect yourself is to take your ARVs as prescribed since it will help keep your immune system strong. If for any reason you have stopped taking ARVs, now would be a good time to start taking them again.

The next time you go to collect your ARVs you can also ask if they can give you enough pills for three months. This will mean that you don't have to keep going back every month to collect it. Remember, every time you go to a crowded place you risk infection with COVID-19.

If you do not have access to treatment because of shortages or stockouts, please call, send a Please Call Me or SMS 084 855 7867. Alternatively you can email: report@stockouts.org





7. WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO AVOID GETTING INFECTED?

While *COVID-19* is different from TB, many of the same rules apply for preventing it.

- We should regularly wash our hands for at least 20 seconds, using soap and water. We should also try not to touch our faces with our hands since the *COVID-19* virus can enter our bodies through our mouths, noses and eyes. We should be especially careful when touching surfaces that many people have touched such as door handles.
- If you cough, you should cough into your elbow or into a tissue. This is because when you cough you can distribute the *COVID-19* virus or the TB bacteria in the area around you.
- As far as we can, we should avoid overcrowded rooms or taxis. If we are not in a position to avoid it, we should try to open the windows so that the air can flow.



8. WHAT IS PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Physical distancing means we try to have as little contact as possible with other people so that the virus does not get a chance to be passed on. The less contact we have with each other, the less the virus will spread in our community and the safer we will all be. South Africa's 21-day lockdown is an extreme form of physical distancing.

People who live in overcrowded conditions will have to find creative ways to do physical distancing in order to protect themselves and their loved ones. The key is to find a way to minimise contact with others while still being able to meet your basic physical and social needs.

One solution to physical distancing in overcrowded conditions is to avoid contact with people outside of your household, but to accept that you will still have close contact with people inside your household. The key then would be for everyone to take responsibility for each other by limiting contact with people outside of the household so that nobody brings the virus back with them and exposes the others.

Physical distancing is social solidarity!

Physical distancing is not just something we do for ourselves and the people we care about, it benefits our entire community by slowing down the spread of the virus. Slowing the spread of the virus is something we can all do together and for each other.



WHAT CAN ACTIVISTS DO?

Activists have a critically important role to play since the government alone cannot stop this virus. Here are some things one can do:

- Activists can help by thinking of ways we can improve physical distancing in our communities. Physical distancing in poor and overcrowded areas is difficult and the government does not have all the answers. We who live in these areas have to come up with ways to make physical distancing work for us. It is after all about our lives and we should take responsibility for it.
- Activists can help to ensure nobody in the community is left behind. We need to especially make sure that old people and other vulnerable groups get the food and medical care they need.
- Activists can help organise for people to get three-month supplies of chronic medicines like ARVs rather than just one month.