

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

01.july 2020

COVID-19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness in animals and humans. In humans, coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections such as common cold and more severe diseases like SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) and now COVID-19 which is a pandemic affecting many countries of the world.

Transmission

COVID-19 is transmitted between people with **respiratory droplets** when an infected person coughs/sneezes **OR** by **touching contaminated objects or surfaces** and then touches eyes, mouth or nose.

After getting infected it takes around **2-14 days** before presenting any symptoms. This is so-called **incubation time**.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms are flu like symptoms, **fever, dry cough and tiredness**. Other symptoms may include body aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhoea, loss of taste and smell, **shortness of breath** and breathing difficulty and rash on skin or discoloration of fingers and toes.

- Most people recover from the disease without hospital treatment and may present mild to moderate illness.
- Around 20% of people who get infected with COVID-19 become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing.
- Anyone experiencing fever and/or cough associated with shortness of breath/difficulty breathing and/or chest pain/pressure should seek medical attention immediately and preferably by contacting the local health provider by phone

More information

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

www.internationalsos.com and typing the Federation code **22AMMS000091**

Risk factors for severe illness of COVID-19

People with the following risk factors are at increased risk of developing severe illness of COVID-19.

People 60 years and older

People having one or more of the following chronic conditions:

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Obesity
- Low immunity (due to a disease or a treatment)
- High blood pressure
- Cardiovascular disease
- Chronic respiratory disease

Person with one or more of these risk factors are encouraged to avoid places, crowds and other context or situation that can expose them to the risk of infection and practice advised public health prevention measures.

Testing

Testing for COVID-19 has become more widely available and is done with a **PCR** (Polymerase chain reaction) method in designated laboratories, by collecting a sample with a **nasopharyngeal** and/or throat swab.

Testing is an important part of breaking the chain of transmission of COVID-19, by identifying those who are infected, isolate and contact trace to reduce further spread of the virus. **It must be noted that the test is not 100% accurate** and there are known reports of both false positive and false negative results.

Local health authorities might have a special criteria for testing according to case definition in the country. Person presenting flulike symptoms, or other suspected COVID-19 symptoms should contact their local health care provider for advice and assessment for testing.

If a person has **tested negative** but has COVID like symptoms, feels unwell OR has been clinically diagnosed by a medical doctor they should continue to self-isolate.

Staff health officers or a designated contact person for COVID-19, in your delegation or office, can provide you with relevant guidance and information on identified health facilities for testing.

Treatment

There is no medication available that prevents or cures COVID-19. Treatment is on case by case basis and supportive with the aim of alleviating and give comfort to symptoms of the disease. Medication to reduce symptoms like fever and pain and to support and improve respiratory function might be prescribed for mild and moderate illness by a medical doctor.

Multiple clinical trials on medication are ongoing with the hope of developing a medication that can prevent or treat COVID-19. **It is not recommended to use any self-medication including antibiotics and corticosteroids.**

Vaccinations

There is no available vaccine COVID-19. In general, IFRC is following the WHO recommendations related to any vaccinations. IFRC vaccination policy is, that no vaccinations are made mandatory for staff.

WHO recommends that all adults should have a Seasonal Influenza vaccination. In this situation the **Seasonal Influenza vaccination is strongly recommended** as it prevents from falling sick with seasonal influenza in case one catches the COVID-19 virus, which could make the combination lethal. In some countries the **vaccination against pneumonia is also recommended.**

Prevention measures

Public health preventative measures are advised to be taken to reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.

Hand hygiene: Practise general good hygiene and wash your hands regularly with soap and water and/or alcohol based (70%) hand sanitizer. Carry your personal pocketed hand sanitizer with you.

Physical distance: Respect the physical distance of **at least 1 meter** but preferably **2 meters** (6 feet) from other people whenever possible.

Respiratory hygiene is to be practised to reduce spread of the virus. Cover your mouth and nose with a bent elbow or paper towel when coughing or sneezing and dispose the paper towel immediately into a closed bin after use.

Avoid touching your face: Viruses can easily be transmitted from hands to the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth and nose.

Keep informed on the latest COVID-19 information from reliable sources such as WHO, IFRC and your local authorities and **follow the advice and regulations** provided by the local health authorities

Medical masks are recommended for health care workers, people caring for suspect or confirmed case of COVID-19 outside of a health facility and anyone with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (including mild symptoms).

Non-medical masks are recommended if local authorities have **made it mandatory to use masks in public** and should be **considered** in settings where living conditions are crowded, widespread

transmission is known and limited capacity for containment measures where physical distancing can't be achieved for general public (bus, train, plane, large social gatherings and other crowded areas).

Masks alone do not provide protection from getting COVID-19. Mask should only be used in full compliance with good hand hygiene and physical distancing whenever possible to reduce the risk of infection. Wrong use of mask can cause harm and expose people to COVID-19 infection

For more information on correct use of mask: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

Travel

Travel restrictions are not recommended by WHO, **however**, it is advisable to **avoid any unnecessary travel** as widespread transmission is ongoing globally.

Travel restrictions are active in some countries and international and domestic carriers for flights or other transport might not be available or limited.

Prepare your travel well and **do not travel if sick**

- Gather information about current travel restrictions, local authorities' regulations and from your delegation.
- Check travel policies and regulations on COVID-19 from airlines or other transport companies. Airlines **might** have a request for testing before travelling or made the use of mask mandatory during the flight.
- Bring your personal hand sanitizer and mask to use. Although masks might be mandated by transport companies or governments during travel they are not always provided.
- Some countries have issued strict quarantine measures. Please check what the guidance is from the Ministry of Health (or other authorities) in your country **and** the country you are travelling to. **Please note that these restrictions and guidance may change rapidly.**

You can find information on the various travel restriction here:

<https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/travel-restrictions-china-due-covid-19>

Office

Please follow and respect the advice on prevention measures at your workplace. Those preventions are provided for staff protection and to reduce the risk of getting infected. Practise good hygiene, **wash your hands** and keep **physical distance** of **2m** for all interaction at the office. **Staff are expected, as always to stay at home if sick or unwell.**

This is to respect each other's health and wellbeing. In general, if the sickness has continued for more than three days, one must provide a sick leave certificate issued by a medical doctor.

NOTE: Even if having a negative test for COVID but feeling unwell or with any COVID like symptoms, staff should not come to work and self-isolate at home

If you get sick with COVID-19

If your COVID-test result is laboratory confirmed as positive **OR** you have been diagnosed by your local health authorities with COVID-19, please follow the guidance given by your health provider for self-isolation, home care or admission to a designated health facility.

Please **inform staff health officer** or a designated **COVID-19 focal point** at your office/delegation about your test result so they can provide the appropriate support and guidance needed.

Relevant information for **contact tracing** within the workplace will be collected according to WHO guidelines. This information might include when symptoms started and who at work you had been in close contact with **1-2 days prior to first day of symptoms**.

Staff member who is considered a **contact** will be informed and **should quarantine and observe their health for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days from the contact with the infected person**.

Staff member can return to the office when he/she has recovered from COVID and has been medically cleared to return back to work by a medical doctor.

NOTE that **confidentiality** is always respected, and these measures are done to ensure the safety of staff members at the office or delegation and to support the staff as needed during their sickness and recovery period.

NOTE that guidance and regulations from **local health authorities should be followed** and they might differ between countries.

Medical evacuation plan

All delegations should check that their medevac plan is up to date. The recommended hospitals and contact details should be checked. Should there be a situation that the delegate falls sick and needs a medevac, it will be done according the insurance policy and the procedures of the emergency assistance company. It must be noted that some seconded delegates have a different emergency assistance provider than IFRC, which is International SOS. The situations might change rapidly.

Insurance

All staff must have an insurance that covers falling sick with COVID-19. Volunteers must have the volunteer insurance in all programs and operations as always. There is a separate document produced related to insurance coverage in this outbreak.

Deployment

Delegates, surge, consultants and others deploying to support the COVID-19 operation in affected countries, **should be briefed on the current, known risks before travel** either face-to-face or over skype or other means. This is to ensure adequate understanding of the risks.

For further advice please contact:

Staff Health Officer: Hannele Haggman
+41 22 730 4417 staff.health@ifrc.org

Staff Health Officer COVID-19: Magna B. Ólafsdóttir
+41 (0)79 895 3803 staffhealth.covid19@ifrc.org

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM GETTING SICK:

Reduce risk of coronavirus infection

- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue - throw tissue away immediately and wash hands
- Avoid close contact with anyone that has fever and cough

Source: WHO

Protect others from getting sick

- Cover mouth and nose with tissue, sleeve or elbow when coughing or sneezing
- Throw tissue into closed bin after use
- Clean hands after coughing or sneezing and when caring for the sick

Source: WHO

Protect yourself and others from getting sick

Wash your hands:

- after toilet use
- after coughing or sneezing
- when caring for the sick
- before, during and after you prepare food
- when hands are visibly dirty
- before eating
- after handling animals or animal waste

Source: WHO

Protect others from getting sick

- Avoid close contact** when you are experiencing cough and fever
- Avoid spitting** in public
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing **seek medical care early** and **share previous travel history** with your health care provider

Source: WHO

When to use a mask

- 1.** If you are healthy, you need only to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected 2019-nCoV infection
- 2.** Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing
- 3.** Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-washing with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- 4.** If you wear a mask then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly

Source: WHO

Wash your hands

- Wash your hands with soap and running water when **hands are visibly dirty**
- If your **hands are not visibly dirty**, frequently clean them by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water

Source: WHO

Stay healthy while travelling

- Avoid travel** if you have a fever and cough
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing **seek medical care early**
- Share previous travel history with your health provider

Source: WHO

Stay healthy while travelling

- Avoid close contact** with people suffering from a fever and cough
- Frequently clean hands** by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- Avoid touching** eyes, nose or mouth

Source: WHO

Stay healthy while travelling

- Eat only **well-cooked food**
- Avoid spitting** in public
- Avoid close contact and travel** with animals that are sick

Source: WHO

Stay healthy while travelling

- When coughing and sneezing **cover mouth and nose** with flexed elbow or tissue - throw tissue away immediately and wash hands
- If you choose to wear a face mask, be sure to cover mouth and nose - avoid touching mask once it's on
- Immediately discard single-use mask after each use and wash hands after removing masks

Source: WHO

Stay healthy while travelling

- If you become sick while travelling, **inform crew and seek medical care early**
- If you seek medical attention, **share travel history with your health care provider**

Source: WHO

Practise food safety

- Even in **areas experiencing outbreaks**, meat products can be safely consumed if these items are **cooked thoroughly and properly handled during food preparation**

Source: WHO

Do's and Don'ts when using a mask

HOW TO WEAR A MEDICAL MASK SAFELY

who.int/epi-win

Do's →

- Wash your hands before touching the mask
- Inspect the mask for tears or holes
- Find the top side, where the metal piece or stiff edge is
- Ensure the colored-side faces outwards
- Place the metal piece or stiff edge over your nose
- Cover your mouth, nose, and chin
- Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides
- Avoid touching the mask
- Remove the mask from behind the ears or head
- Keep the mask away from you and surfaces while removing it
- Discard the mask immediately after use preferably into a closed bin
- Wash your hands after discarding the mask

Don'ts →

- Do not use a ripped or damp mask
- Do not wear the mask only over mouth or nose
- Do not wear a loose mask
- Do not touch the front of the mask
- Do not remove the mask to talk to someone or do other things that would require touching the mask
- Do not leave your used mask within the reach of others
- Do not re-use the mask

Remember that masks alone cannot protect you from COVID-19. Maintain at least 1 metre distance from others and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, even while wearing a mask.

EPI·WIN World Health Organization