Staff health

International Federation
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) COVID-19

How can I protect myself at the office?

Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer when access to handwashing facilities are not nearby. Hand sanitizers should be available at the office for use when entering and/or exiting office spaces and common areas. It is advised to carry a pocket-sized hand sanitizer for personal use.

Why? Soap and 70% alcohol-based hand sanitizer kills the virus on your hands and is an important prevention measure in reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

Maintain physical distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet), preferably 2 meters, from others whenever possible.

Why? The virus spreads between persons through small droplets from the mouth and nose when a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, exhales and talks. Those droplets spray around the infected person before it drops down to surfaces. People can breathe in the droplets if physical distance from other is not kept, and by touching contaminated surfaces and then touch eyes, nose or mouth.

Avoid touching your face

Hands that have been contaminated from surfaces can transfer the virus and infect a person through the mucous membranes of nose, mouth and eyes.

Practice respiratory hygiene

Cover your coughs and sneezes with your bent elbow or paper towel. Immediately dispose of used paper towel and then wash your hands

Cleaning of workplace surfaces

Keep your personal work space clean. Wipe surfaces at your desk (keyboard, mouse, phone, tablet, desk) regularly with 70% alcohol or 0.5% hypochlorite disinfectant.

Why? Cleaning of surfaces that you touch frequently at work kills the virus and prevents the spread of COVID-19.

What is a suspect case of COVID-19?

WHO defines a suspect case as:

A. A patient with acute respiratory illness (fever and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease, e.g., cough, shortness of
breath), AND a history of travel to or residence in a location reporting community transmission of COVID-19 disease during the
14 days prior to symptom onset;
OR
B. A patient with any acute respiratory illness AND having been in contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case (see
definition of "Contact") in the last 14 days prior to symptom onset;
OR C. A patient with severe acute respiratory illness (fever and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease, e.g., cough, shortness of breath; AND requiring hospitalization) AND in the absence of an alternative diagnosis that fully explains the clinical presentation.

What is a probable case of COVID-19?

WHO defines a probable case as:

A. A suspect case for whom testing for the COVID-19 virus is inconclusive.
OR
B. A suspect case for whom testing could not be performed for any reason.

What is a confirmed case of COVID-19?

WHO defines a confirmed case as a person with laboratory confirmation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus causing COVID-19 disease, irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms.

What to do if I have COVID like symptoms?

If you develop fever, cough, headache, difficulty breathing or other COVID like symptoms, you should seek medical advice. Call by telephone your local health facility or national COVID-19 hotline if available in your area. Follow the advice and guidance provided to you.

Self-isolate yourself from others at your home and practice preventative measures to mitigate risk of possible transmission to others.

Why? Local health authorities will provide you with up to date information regarding the situation in your area, advise on the next steps to be taken and guide you to the right health facility if that is needed.

Should I go to work if I feel unwell?

Do not go to work - Stay at home if you feel unwell

Even if only having very mild symptoms and feeling unwell, it is advised to stay home until any of your symptoms (fever, cough, headache, runny nose) have been absent for 72h. Contact your local health clinic for advice.

If a COVID test has been taken and is negative despite having COVID like symptoms. Staff should **not come to work**, continue to self-isolate and seek medical advice.

Why? COVID-19 can be transmitted to others even when presenting very mild symptoms. Staying at home is necessary to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other sicknesses at your workplace and to ensure the wellbeing of you and your co-workers.

What do I do if i start having symptoms or feel unwell while at work?

Keep physical distance of 2meters (**at least** 1-meter) from others and practice good hand and respiratory hygiene. If you carry a mask with you, put the mask on and make sure it fits well and covers both nose and mouth.

Prepare to leave the office. Contact the staff health officer or a designated contact person for COVID-19 at your workplace and inform them. Staff health will provide you with a mask if needed, and guidance to a designated isolation room (when applicable) and support you in the next step to be taken.

The mask should be worn during transport home or in the case of an emergency, to a health facility.

Do I need to inform my office if I have suspected or confirmed COVID-19?

If an IFRC staff member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is suspected to have COVID-19, Staff health officer should be informed by phone **+41 (0)79 895 3803**. Staff health officer provides support and guidance when needed and confidentiality is respected.

Staff member needs to inform her/his line manager to report only that he/she is sick. No further medical information is needed when reporting to a line manager.

Staff Health officer will collect relevant information for workplace contact tracing according to WHO definitions of contact. Co-workers who are contacts will be notified and provided with guidance and advice on prevention measures and next steps.

Note that local authorities are responsible for general contact tracing and staff health will only gather information regarding contact within the workplace to mitigate further transmission and stop the chain of transmission for staff's safety and wellbeing.

How long do I have to stay home if i have COVID-19 like symptoms?

It is recommended to stay home for 72 hours (3 days) after any COVID-19 related symptoms have resolved. If local health authorities or physicians' recommendations propose longer time those should be followed.

Why? Most people develop mild and moderate symptoms of COVID-19 that can resemble other illnesses. Staying home for 72 hours will reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 or other illnesses to your colleagues. This is public health preventative measure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Can I get a test to see if I have COVID-19?

Although testing for COVID -19 has become more available globally your local health authorities might have special criteria for testing according to the government or WHO case definition for COVID-19. Persons presenting with flu like symptoms, or other suspected COVID-19 symptoms should contact their local health care provider by phone for advice and assessment for testing.

What is a PCR test?

PCR test is a molecular test that detects genetic material of the virus and tells if a person is currently infected with COVID-19. A nasal (nasopharyngeal) and/or throat swab is taken for PCR testing.

It must be noted that PCR test is not 100% accurate. There are reports of false positives and false negative test. Self-isolation should continue if COVID like symptoms are present (despite negative test) or a clinical diagnosis is given by a medical doctor.

What is an antibody test?

From a blood sample it is possible to do a serologic testing that looks for antibodies against the virus. It can detect if a person has a past infection of the virus causing COVID-19. Antibodies to COVID-19 can take days to weeks to be produced after a COVID -19 infection. Having antibodies indicates that a person was infected with the virus causing COVID-19 regardless of the severity of the disease. There is no evidence available that people that had COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection.

Antibody tests are not recommended by WHO to be used to diagnose infection of COVID-19, as antibodies can take 1-3 weeks to develop in the body and give information if a person has had COVID-19 infection in the past. It does not measure if a person has and active infection at the time of the test.

Should I wear a mask for my protection in public and at work?

Use of medical and non-medical masks in COVID-19 pandemic is either for protection or as a potential benefit for source control.

WHO recommends use of **medical masks** for:

- Health workers
- Anyone with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, including mild symptoms
- People caring for suspect or confirmed cases of COVID-19 outside of health facilities
- People aged 60 or over and people with pre-existing health conditions (such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic lung disease, cancer, cerebrovascular disease and immunosuppression) **in settings where physical distancing can't be achieved**

WHO recommends **non-medical masks** to be **considered** for general population:

- In crowded settings in areas where widespread transmission is suspected and limited capacity for implementation of containment measures
- People living in crowded conditions such as refugee camps
- Settings where physical distancing can't be achieved for general public (bus, airplane, trains, crowded gatherings, grocery stores)
- Specific working conditions which places an employee in potential close contact with others

NOTE: Mask alone cannot protect you from COVID-19. Mask should always be used in full compliance with hand hygiene and physical distancing when possible.

More information on face masks**:** *https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks*

Should I wear a mask when using public transportation?

Although public transportation companies might increase their trips due to COVID-19, it is advisable to always take preventative precautions. Keep up to date on your local health authorities advise and regulations. It has become obligatory in some countries to wear a mask when using public transportation

- Carry a pocket size hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol
- Practise physical distance of 2 meters whenever possible and the minimum of 1 meter
- Practise respiratory hygiene
- Do not use public transportation i.e. bus, train, plane if you are sick
- Avoid crowded areas
- Try to avoid touching multiple surfaces and use disinfectant if you need to touch surfaces during the transport
- Consider using a non-medical mask for mitigation of transmission during transport
- People with pre-existent medical conditions and over the age of 60 years old should strongly consider using a medical mask while using public transportation
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Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

There is no available vaccine for COVID-19 yet. Several trials are ongoing with coordinated efforts to develop a vaccine; however, such trials take time and it is uncertain when a vaccine will become available.

IFRC follows WHO recommendations related to vaccinations. IFRC encourages all staff to follow these guidelines, however vaccination is not mandatory for staff - but left to the discretion of the person.

WHO strongly recommends that all adults should have a seasonal Influenza vaccination. Prevention of seasonal Influenza could be life-saving, particularly in view of being infected with Covid-19 at the same time. In some countries vaccination against pneumonia is also recommended.

Is there a treatment available for COVID-19?

Treatment for Covid-19 is supportive. There is currently no specific drug therapy or medication available as a treatment for COVID-19.

Supportive treatment is provided by medical personnel to reduce discomfort of symptoms of COVID-19 disease on a case by case basis in health facilities. WHO does not recommend using any self-medication including antibiotics and corticosteroids.

What does it mean to be a contact?

A contact is a person who has come in contact, by any of the following, from 2 days before and up to 14 days after the onset of symptoms in a person with confirmed COVID-19:

- Having face-to face contact with a COVID-19 infected person within 1meter and for more then 15 minutes
- Provided direct care for a person with COVID-19 disease without using proper personal protective equipment
- Staying in the same close environment as a COVID-19 infected person (including sharing a workplace classroom or household or being at the same gathering) for any amount of time
- Travelling in close proximity with (within 1m separation) a COVID-19 infected person in any kind of conveyance
- Other situations, as indicated by local risk assessment

More information on COVID-19

IFRC Health Help desk: *https://www.preparecenter.org/toolkit/healthhelpdesk/*

GO platform: *https://go.ifrc.org/*

FedNet: *https://fednet.ifrc.org/*

WHO:*https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses*

For Staff Health and COVID-19, please contact: *staffhealth.covid19@ifrc.org*