

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS REFERENCE GUIDE

WHILE COVID-19 CONTINUES TO POSE A THREAT TO OUR COMMUNITIES, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE PRACTISING ALL THE RECOMMENDED PRECAUTIONS TO LIMIT OUR RISK OF EXPOSURE. WE OFFER SOME GUIDANCE AND KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO MANAGE YOUR RISK, AND BETTER UNDERSTAND THE VIRUS.

IN LIGHT OF THIS, WE URGE THE PUBLIC TO TAKE THE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS AT ALL TIMES. WE ALSO ENCOURAGE ANYONE EXPERIENCING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 OR WHO THINKS THAT THEY MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS TO CONTACT THEIR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER OR PHONE THE MEDICLINIC COVID-19 HOTLINE NUMBER ON 0860 24 00 24.

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease) refers to the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. SARS-CoV-2 was a new (novel) strain in the coronavirus group which had not been detected in the humans prior to 2019. Due to the widespread global transmission COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS?

Coronavirus is a large family of viruses, common throughout the world, which are responsible for the 'common cold' and usually cause self-limiting upper respiratory tract infections. There are many different coronaviruses identified in animals, but only a small number of these can cause disease in humans. Sometimes coronaviruses infecting animals can evolve to cause disease in humans and become a new (novel) coronavirus in humans. Examples of this include Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012, and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV), which emerged from China in 2002.

On 9 January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that a new coronavirus was identified in China associated with an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan City in the Hubei Province. This virus is called SARS-CoV-2.

HOW IS THE VIRUS SPREAD?

The virus is mainly spread through respiratory droplets which are produced during coughing, sneezing, talking or singing by an infected person, who may or may not have symptoms and exposes another uninfected person. Although keeping 2 meters away from others reduces the risk of transmission it is important to protect your nose and mouth by wearing a mask at all times in public. Since droplets can land on and survive on a surface like a table or door handle for some time, it is possible to transfer the virus

by contact from your hands to your eyes, nose and mouth if you have not cleaned your hands. It can survive on the surface for a long time, and if you touch that surface with the virus, and then touch your face, especially your eyes, mouth or nose, you could become infected.

Reduce the risk by reducing personal contact (e.g. shaking hands) and cleaning your hands before touching your eyes, nose or mouth, and after coughing or sneezing.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

Most people who get this disease will have very mild symptoms, like having a cold. However some people, especially those who have other illnesses, such as heart disease, chronic lung diseases or kidney diseases may become sicker.

People who develop COVID-19 generally have one the following symptoms

- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste and smell
- Cough
- Weakness and diarrhoea
- Muscle aches

In very severe cases, people who have the infection might start to have difficulty breathing, or feel very short of breath. If this happens, they should go to the hospital.

HOW IS THE DIAGNOSIS OF COVID-19 CONFIRMED?

Laboratory testing is mainly done by taking a swab of respiratory samples from your nose or throat. The result of your test may only be available 24-48 hours later and your treating doctor or laboratory will inform you of the results.

HOW IS COVID-19 INFECTION TREATED?

There is no specific treatment for a viral respiratory infection and symptomatic treatment may be suggested (e.g. for reducing fever or sore throat). If more severe, it may be necessary for some patients to be treated in hospital (e.g. if they require oxygen for shortness of breath). Antibiotics should not be used to treat a viral infection and would only be necessary if there is a secondary bacterial infection.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE THE VIRUS?

If you have been in contact with somebody with COVID-19, stay at home – do not go to school or to public places. Get plenty of rest, and stay hydrated by drinking enough fluids. Practice good cough etiquette when coughing or sneezing. Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. If you feel short of breath, or have difficulty breathing, go to the nearest hospital.

HOW ARE PATIENTS PRESENTING AT HOSPITALS MANAGED?

All patients being admitted via Emergency Centres or into the hospital for planned admissions will be asked specific questions at reception and then clinically assessed as necessary. If necessary, a specific protocol will then be followed to confirm whether testing is indicated and the care required will be assessed. In most cases, hospitalisation will not be necessary, and patients will be able to self-quarantine and recover at home. Protocols relating to care of patients with diseases and infections are part of routine processes and align with evidence based guidelines within our hospitals. Staff will wear protection such as masks and visors whilst caring for affected patients and all patients will be requested to wear a mask at all times as far as possible when in hospital to protect others in contact with them.

HOW CAN COVID-19 INFECTION BE PREVENTED?

Because the virus is spread by droplets and touching surfaces that have been exposed to the virus, you should do the following to prevent getting infected:

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water – normal soap and water is enough to kill the virus, you don't need special antibacterial soaps
- If you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand rub (liquid or gel) that contains at least 60% alcohol – the alcohol in the gel or liquid will be enough to kill the virus
- Do not touch your face if you have not washed your hands
- Wear a mask which covers your mouth and nose at all times when outside your home environment. If you use a tissue after coughing or sneezing, practice good cough etiquette to reduce spread to others and if you use a tissue throw it away after use and clean your hands. Change your mask if soiled or damp
- Avoid contact with anyone who is sick and if ill, stay at home
- If you are in a public area, try to maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from other people
- Avoid shaking hands or hugging people, limit social

gatherings and try to meet in outside areas where there is good airflow to reduce the risk

HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED TO BE TESTED FOR COVID-19?

Mediclinic has a handy online testing tool to assist you in understanding your need to be assessed for COVID-19. You can access it here or by visiting www.mediclinic.co.za

You can also call the Mediclinic COVID-19 Hotline number on 0860 24 00 24.