



## **COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is a novel coronavirus?**

A novel coronavirus is a coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

### **2. What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered virus that has been named “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2” (SARS - CoV-2).

The new virus & disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 which has subsequently spread worldwide.

### **3. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. There are no specific or pathognomonic signs or symptoms of COVID-19 that can reliably differentiate it from other flu like illnesses. However high-grade fever and respiratory distress make the possibility of COVID-19 more likely.

### **4. Is COVID 19 almost always fatal?**

No. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment.

Older people, those with underlying medical problems (high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, respiratory illness), undergoing chemotherapy or smokers are more likely to develop a serious illness

#### **5. How does COVID-19 spread?**

Healthy people can become infected with SARS-CoV-2 from already infected people and develop COVID-19 illness.

The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person.

Other people can then be infected by touching those contaminated objects or surfaces, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

People can also be infected if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs or sneezes in close proximity. Therefore, it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

#### **6. Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be transmitted through the air?**

Studies to date suggest that the virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets and touching contaminated surfaces rather than through the air.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces.

#### **7. What can I do to protect myself and prevent the spread of disease?**

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.

- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.
- Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 hotspots (cities or local areas where COVID-19 is spreading widely). If possible, avoid traveling to places—especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart or lung disease.

#### **8. Who are at risk of developing severe illness?**

COVID-2019 affects all people. Older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

#### **9. Should I wear mask to protect myself?**

Only wear a mask if you are ill with flu like symptoms (especially coughing) or looking after someone who may have COVID-19.

Disposable face mask can only be used once.

If you are not ill or not looking after someone who is ill, then you are wasting a mask.

There is a world-wide shortage of masks, so WHO urges people to use masks wisely.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Masks might be worn in some countries according to local cultural habits. If masks are used, best practices should be followed on how to wear, remove, and dispose of them and on hand hygiene action after removal. For more information, visit the WHO guidance on use of masks in the community.

#### **10. How long is the incubation period or time of catching the virus and development of the symptoms for COVID-19?**

The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and becoming symptomatic. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days. These estimates will be updated as more data become available.

### **11. What are social distancing measures?**

Social distancing measures are used to reduce social interaction between people and to eventually reduce the transmission of coronavirus.

Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others.

Avoid non-essential use of public transport & large and small gatherings in public space (In places like restaurants, shopping malls, etc., infection can spread easily in closed spaces where people gather).

Avoid gatherings with friends and family.

Use telephone or online services to contact your doctor or other essential services.

### **12. Do I need a special soap to destroy the virus?**

No, any soap can destroy the virus. Soap molecules will destroy the outer lipid layers of virus, but they need a minimum contact time of 20 seconds with soap molecules.

### **13. What does proper handwashing mean?**

Wet your hands with water and apply enough soap to cover your hands.

Rub your hands together.

Use 1 hand to rub the back of the other hand and clean in between the fingers. Do the same with the other hand.

Rub your hands together and clean in between your fingers.

Rub the back of your fingers against your palms.

Rub your thumb using your other hand. Do the same with the other thumb.

Rub the tips of your fingers on the palm of your other hand. Do the same with other hand.

Rinse your hands with water and dry your hands completely with a fresh towel.

Regular hand washing every 4 hours is recommended to get rid of the virus that is contracted through fomites or from the other people.

#### **14. What kind of Hand sanitizers are needed to handle SARS - CoV -2 virus?**

Alcohol-based sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol) can be as effective as soap, only if they are used properly.

Just putting a little dollop in the palm and wiping quickly isn't good enough.

Rub it all over your hands, between your fingers & on the back of your hands, only then they are as effective as soap and water.

#### **15. Which one is better? Soap water or Hand Sanitizer**

Hand washing with soap and water is found to be more effective in destroying the virus than sanitizers.

The commercially available sanitizers may be of questionable quality and may not have 60% of alcohol content. Also, users many not know the correct usage of the same.

Hand sanitizers are preferably to be used when soap and water are not available

#### **16. What is quarantine and why do we need it?**

Quarantine separates people who may have been exposed to coronavirus from other healthy people so that disease transmission can be interrupted.

Quarantine usually lasts for as long as the upper limit of the virus' incubation period (the time between being exposed and showing symptoms) which is around 14 days

Isolation is carried out in specially designed wards of the hospital and is meant to separate the patient from others and lasts for as long as the patient is symptomatic. As some patients can develop serious illness, admission is necessary for better health care provision. The patient can be discharged once tests for presence of virus are negative. person is free of symptoms and tests negative for the virus

#### **17. Why is cooperation with quarantine essential?**

Quarantine is essential to stop the transmission of virus and to control the number of patients.

The highly infectious nature of this virus makes it spread very rapidly and rise in number of active cases through a chain reaction like process which eventually overwhelms the health system as has happened in some countries.

**18. What we should do if any family members start suffering from fever, cough and sneezing?**

Isolate the individual in the house and if possible, provide a separate room with an attached bathroom.

Clean the surfaces that may be contaminated with stools or any bodily fluids.

Clean high-touch surfaces (doorknobs, phones, bedside tables, tabletops, toilets, bathroom fixtures) 2-3 times daily.

Such a person should wear a triple layer surgical mask.

Continue monitoring symptoms daily & consult your doctor.

**19. What to do when you cough/sneeze?**

Try to cover your mouth & nose with a tissue.

Immediately throw tissues in garbage and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20seconds or if not available, clean with hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.

Cough/sneeze into your elbow.

**20. What you should not do during this COVID 19 pandemic?**

Neglecting the advice of your health care provider and authorities.

Smoking or using or taking antibiotics of your choice.

Wearing multiple masks

**21. Is treatment available in the alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Homeopathy and Unani?**

No. Among the coronaviruses, SARS - CoV-2 is latest and there are no studies supporting the benefit of using these medicines.

**22. What precautions one must take when they go out for buying groceries or essential medicines?**

It's better to avoid going out. Search for online delivery facilities in your locality and get the needed articles.

If online delivery facilities are not available and going out is inevitable it's better to wear a mask and carry a hand sanitizer while going out especially if contact with other people is anticipated.

It's better to select an individual among the family members for getting things all the time. This will avoid exposure of all family members to infection.

At shops or medical stores maintain minimum 1-meter distance while interacting and as far as possible don't touch any surfaces.

It's better to return home as early as possible.

**23. Are there any special precautions for pregnant women?**

Pregnancy is a period of physiological stress. While there is no evidence to suggest otherwise, it is prudent to advise pregnant women to follow social distancing, hand hygiene and use of mask in public places rigorously.

**24. Can we allow maids or servants during the COVID-19 pandemic or not?**

Ideally social distancing would include interaction with maids and helpers. If this is unavoidable, one should advise them to be careful and practice usual anti-covid-19 measures. One should be careful of any symptoms and take medical advice.

**25. Do I stop taking newspaper or milk packets from regular suppliers?**

Anything can act as fomite for transmission of virus so it's better to practice regular hand hygiene after dealing with such a situation apart from strict social distancing measures.

**26. Do I need to remove pets during this period?**

Animals acting as carriers is not very clear. A pet dog belonging to an owner who had COVID-19 was found to harbour the same virus. However, the dog did not show any clinical signs of the disease and there is no evidence that dogs can spread the disease or that the disease can cause an animal to fall ill. We need further studies for the same.

However, animal fur can act as a carrier of the virus in contact with infected people. One should be careful about where a dog or pet is allowed.

**27. Does the virus penetrate through intact skin?**

No. There is no evidence that virus can penetrate through intact skin. Avoid patients body fluids especially respiratory secretions, blood and contact with non- intact skin.

**28. Do I need to change clothes every time I come home?**

If you are coming home from a high infection likelihood place like a fever clinic, it is advisable to change clothes and shower.

Even otherwise if possible, this can be done.

**29. What should I do if I have sleep disturbances or anxiety during the pandemic?**

Consult the mental health professional as early as possible through telephone or crisis helplines and discuss about your problems. Please call up at PGI corona helpline number 0172 2755444

**30. Should we avoid eating non-vegetarian food during this period?**

No. There is no evidence that virus transmits through meat or non-vegetarian food as of now.

**31. Is there any drug treatment for COVID-19?**

In majority of cases infection with Corona Virus are associated with mild flu like symptoms such as fever, cough, fatigue, body aches. In a few cases, largely in those with underlying illness such as diabetes, hypertension, chronic kidney disease and elderly it may take a more severe form.

Currently there are no approved treatments for COVID-19 disease. Many drugs are being evaluated in a trial mode. This means that till now there is no substantial proof of their usefulness for covid-19. Doctors or Institutes, if advising/using these drugs must follow the required procedures for using such drugs. No One should carry out self-medication.

**32. Are there any drugs /vaccines for prevention of Corona Virus Infection?”**

The best proven methods for prevention are infection prevention methods such as hand washing with soap, cleaning with alcohol-based sanitizers and social distancing. Some drugs and vaccines are under evaluation though.

**33. What was ICMR advisory regarding use of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and what are important points which MUST NOT be ignored?**

Following release of ICMR advisory for Hydroxychloroquine use as a prophylactic agent for a very selected group of people (asymptomatic healthcare workers of suspected/proven COVID 19 and asymptomatic household contacts of laboratory confirmed cases), several people have indulged in self-medication with the drug. Important things that need to be noted are – This drug is largely used for rheumatoid arthritis and has usefulness in malaria. For either treatment and prevention of COVID 19, there is no substantially proven benefit exists till date. This is mentioned in the advisory also. Like many drugs, this drug also has certain side effects. Hence a proper evaluation of patients is done before starting it even for rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus. **Any self-medication with hydroxychloroquine is wrong** and may even be dangerous. Doctors prescribing the drug for contacts of corona virus infected patients, should acquaint themselves with the side effect and need for monitoring and ensure the same. At our institute, for those healthcare workers who want to take it in view of the advisory, a plan has been put in place for administration after evaluation and proper information provided to the interested person and only after consent. A facility for monitoring these people is also set in place. **It is emphasised that as of now, infection prevention methods are the only ones which are substantiated.**

**34. What are the important side effects of hydroxychloroquine?**

The known side effects of the drug include: headache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, weight loss, hypoglycaemia (lowered blood glucose levels), blurred vision, bronchospasm, skin rashes, pruritis, steven Johnson syndrome, toxic epidermal necrolysis, agranulocytosis, anaemia, ataxia, dizziness, vertigo, seizure, psychosis, nightmares, irritability, suicidal tendency, myopathy,

deafness, tinnitus, some disturbance in ECG. While most of these are transient and reversible, vision disturbance may persist for long or may progress despite discontinuation if advanced. Besides this, you may experience some unwanted adverse effects, which may be serious, that have not been reported so far as may occur with any drug administration. **Several of these side effects occur after long term use of this drug, however some side effects can occur suddenly and unpredictably.**

**It must be noted if the drug has been prescribed to you previously for rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), it would have been done by your treating doctor after due consideration of risk and benefit. For these conditions, please continue your treatment as advised by the doctor.**

**35. On hearing about ICMR advisory on television, I took hydroxychloroquine and gave it to my 5 years old daughter. What should I do now?**

An update on advisory notes that the drug should not be given without medical prescription. Children below 6 years are not recommended the drug anyways. The advisory notes that children below 15 years should not be given for prevention of Corona Virus Infection. **In certain medical situations, such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) or rheumatoid arthritis only after due examination, children are prescribed the drug, but they are monitored for the same. Those children who have been previously prescribed hydroxychloroquine by a doctor for their medical condition such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus should continue taking their medicine as a risk benefit assessment would have been done by their prescribing doctor.**

**36. Can I say No to taking HCQ for prevention of Corona infection?**

Yes, you are well within your rights to say No to HCQ for prevention of Corona infection.

**37. I am a patient of rheumatoid arthritis and am already taking Hydroxychloroquine, should I continue taking it?**

You must continue taking it as prescribed by your doctor

**38. Which drug should you take for fever or pain if you have flu like symptoms?**

Acetaminophen or paracetamol is the drug recommended by most guidelines for fever or pain with flu symptoms. Other analgesics such as ibuprofen are best avoided

**39. I am a hypertensive and am taking losartan. Should I change my treatment?**

There is no need to change your treatment. You may ask your treating doctor if you need to change or modify for improper control of blood pressure.

**40. I am a hypertensive and I am taking enalapril. Should I change my treatment?**

There is no need to change your treatment. You may ask your treating doctor if you need to change or modify for improper control of blood pressure.

**41. I have running nose and low-grade fever and suspect that I may have infection with corona, should I take azithromycin?**

Please do not take any medication yourself including azithromycin. For fever you may take paracetamol. You should call up PGI helpline for advice regarding isolation, testing and follow up at 2755444

**42. I have cold and sore throat and fever, should I take amoxicillin-clavulanic acid?**

Please do not take any medication yourself including amoxicillin-clavulanic acid. For fever you may take paracetamol. You should call up PGI helpline for advice regarding isolation, testing and follow up at 0172 2755444

**43. I am a known asthmatic; can I continue to take my inhaler if needed?**

Yes. Please continue your treatment as advised by your treating doctor. In case of any advice, you may call your doctor

**44. My child's vaccination is due; can I take her for vaccination?**

Vaccination centres are open. You can take your child for vaccination after following the recommendations for travel by the authorities. Please

**45. My mother’s chemotherapy was due; will she get it in the hospital?**

Yes, she will get it. Please visit screening area of your hospital for proper guidance regarding further movement and precautions

**46. Where can I seek drug related advice for any further queries?**

Please call up at PGI corona helpline number 0172-2755444 or the PGI Drug Information Unit on 0172-2755245 (9 am to 5 pm)

*Compiled by Corona Prevention & IEC Committee, PGIMER Chandigarh with inputs from various experts and WHO (<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>)*

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\*These FAQs reflect the current state of evidence and these may change with time. These are meant to be educational in nature and this is not an advisory. In case of any doubt, please contact your health care provider.