**Corona Virus/ COVID-19**

The concern about COVID-19 is that, unlike influenza, there is no vaccine and no specific treatment for the disease. It also appears to be as transmissible as influenza if not more so. As it is a new virus, nobody has prior immunity which in theory means that the entire human population is potentially susceptible to COVID-19 infection.

**Medical information**

**1. What are the symptoms of COVID-19 infection**

The virus can cause mild, flu-like symptoms such as:

* fever
* cough
* difficulty breathing
* muscle pain
* tiredness

More serious cases develop severe pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and septic shock that can lead to death.

**2. Are some people more at risk than others?**

Generally elderly people and those with underlying health conditions (e.g. hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer) are considered to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms.

**3. Are children also at risk of infection?**

Disease in children appears to be relatively rare and mild. A large study from China suggested that just over 2% of cases were under 18 years of age. Of these, fewer than 3% developed severe or critical disease.

**4. What is the mode of transmission? How (easily) does it spread?**

While animals are the original source of the virus, it is now spreading from person to person (human-to-human transmission). There is not enough epidemiological information at this time to determine how easily and sustainably this virus spreads between people, but it is currently estimated that, on average, one infected person will infect between two and three more. The virus seems to be transmitted mainly via respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough, or exhale. The virus can also survive for several hours on surfaces such as tables and door handles.

The incubation period for COVID-19 (i.e. the time between exposure to the virus and onset of symptoms) is currently estimated at between two and 14 days. At this stage, we know that the virus can be transmitted when people who are infected show flu-like symptoms such as coughing.  There is evidence suggesting that transmission can occur from an infected person with no symptoms; however, uncertainties remain about the effect of transmission by non-symptomatic persons on the epidemic.

**Prevention**

**1. How can I avoid getting infected?**

The virus enters your body via your eyes, nose and/or mouth, so it is important to avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

Washing of hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or cleaning hands with alcohol-based solutions, gels or tissues is recommended in all settings.

It is also recommended to stay 1 metre or more away from people infected with COVID-19 who are showing symptoms, to reduce the risk of infection through respiratory droplets.

**2. What should I do if I have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19?**

Notify public health authorities in your area who will provide guidance on further steps to take. If you develop any symptoms, you should immediately call your healthcare provider for advice, mentioning that you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.

**3. Are face masks effective in protecting against COVID-19?**

If you are infected, the use of surgical face masks may reduce the risk of you infecting other people, but there is *no evidence* that face masks will effectively prevent you from being infected with the virus. In fact, it is possible that the use of face masks may even increase the risk of infection due to a false sense of security and increased contact between hands, mouth and eyes.

**4. Is there a vaccine against the virus? How long will it take to develop a vaccine?**

There are currently no vaccines against human coronaviruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19. This is why it is very important to prevent infection and to contain further spread of the virus.