

CORONAVIRUS

The coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a global public health emergency. We would like to assure staff that the Department is ready to deal with any confirmed or suspected cases when presented to any of our health facilities. Globally there have been 43 103 confirmed (11 February 2020).

South Africa have tested 63 cases for the virus but to date there are **no cases of COVID-19**.

The Coronavirus has flu-like symptoms which all health facilities can manage and, if necessary, make the appropriate referral if a person matches the criteria and has a travel history to China in recent weeks or came into contact with someone who has and is ill.

South Africa is following international protocol and has developed and distributed clinical guidelines and case definitions to doctors and nurses in both the public and the private sectors. We urge people to follow their normal route to access health service through their local health facility and not directly go to Tygerberg Hospital or other hospitals. All health facilities can manage, diagnose and respond to a possible COVID-19 case and make the appropriate referral if a person matches the criteria and has a travel history.

What is the case definition?

For a person to become a suspected case they would **need to match** the criteria as having flu-like symptoms (Mild to severe respiratory illness with a sudden onset of fever, cough, difficulty breathing and a sore throat) but **need to also have a travel history** to an area where the virus has been confirmed or **came into contact** with a person who has the virus.

What happens if a person presents to a facility with symptoms matching the criteria?

If a person presents to a health facility and matches the criteria it is standard procedure to isolate them in a suitable room/unit for assessment, apply infection prevention and control measures. This is done at all health facilities. The facility should contact the Infectious Disease Specialist/Virologist at Tygerberg or Groote Schuur Hospital. Clinicians are also requested to discuss all cases with the NICD doctor by contacting the NICD hotline on 082 883 9920. Following the assessment and if required, a test will be done and sent to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) for analysis. This laboratory is the only laboratory which can confirm if it is COVID-19 or not.

A patient is not deemed to have COVID-19 until the results from the test at the NICD returns positive. Once confirmed the person will be admitted to the designated hospital for further management.

What is coronavirus?

- Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses that are common among animals. Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world. The viruses can make people sick, usually with a mild to moderate upper respiratory tract illness, similar to a common cold.
- A new coronavirus was identified in China associated with an outbreak of pneumonia. This virus is the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), which has resulted in a number of deaths.

How does it spread?

- The COVID-19 spreads mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

What are the symptoms?

- Mild to severe respiratory illness with
- Sudden onset of fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- As this is a new virus the complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is still not fully clear.

Who is at greater risk?

- Currently travellers to Wuhan, China and other affected areas of China are at greatest risk of infection.
- People who develop symptoms of respiratory illness including cough, fever and shortness of breath within 14 days of travel to countries where COVID-19 is known to be circulating should seek medical care early and share information about travel history with their doctors.

Prevention

There are currently no vaccines available to protect you against human coronavirus infection. Transmission is reduced through:

- Washing hands often with soap and water
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throw it away
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

Treatment

Treatment is supportive (e.g. provide oxygen for patients with shortness of breath or treatment for fever). Antibiotics do not treat viral infections. However, antibiotics may be required if bacterial secondary infection develops.