
Covid-19: Preventing the spread of infection.

In the media we hear about Covid 19 outbreaks in hotels, restaurants, cruise ships, schools and hospitals.

Why does the virus cause such widespread problems and how can outbreaks be prevented or controlled?

Symptoms of Covid 19 infection

The symptoms are:

- Persistent cough
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Muscle pain

Some people may also have:

- headaches
- stomach cramps

There is no specific treatment for Covid 19 infection, but the symptoms can lead to pneumonia which is a particular concern for the vulnerable groups – children, the elderly, and those with other illnesses. Those who have Covid 19 infection self-isolate for 7 days for an individual or 14 days for a family.

Some people do not have any symptoms, although they may still be carriers of the virus for several days of longer.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of Covid 19?

Prevention of Covid 19 outbreak is difficult, but good hygiene practices can help reduce the spread of the infection:

- Good hand hygiene is a very important infection control measure. Thorough washing and drying of the hands allow for the removal of dirt and debris containing the viral particles and is a good way of cleaning the harder to reach places, such as under the fingernails. It is particularly important to wash and dry the hands after using the toilet and before preparing food as this will limit the spread of the infection. Other important instances are after cleaning surfaces, after clearing up vomited material, after toileting of young children and after handling baby's nappies. During the Covid 19 outbreak, or when helping an infected person at home, it makes sense to wash and dry the hands more frequently throughout the day - touching a contaminated surface then placing the hands in the mouth can lead to infection.
- Hand gels should not be used to entirely replace the washing and drying of the hands but can be used as an additional precaution when the hands are not visibly dirty or when soap and water are not available. However, care must be taken to use products which are proven to be effective against Covid 19. There is some evidence that because of the

structure of the virus, it is not very susceptible to some alcohol-based sanitizers.

- Disinfect any surfaces which might be contaminated with Covid 19 – use bleach where possible or another disinfectant. Soft materials such as curtains should be thoroughly washed and laundered. Carpets may need professional disinfection treatments. Food preparation surfaces and hand contact surfaces should also be disinfected as part of normal cleaning and disinfection routines.
- Those who have been ill with suspected Covid 19 are normally advised not to return to their normal places of work or study until at least 14 days after the symptoms have stopped. During this time they should not prepare food for others and should avoid contact with others.
- Those ill on holiday should be isolated from others – on cruise ships they are advised to stay in their cabins and use their own toilet facilities, but staff must help them by providing food, cleaning and support. If staff do not help in this way then passengers will be much more likely to go back into public areas while still infectious.
- Adherence to the principles of food safety will go a long way in helping to prevent the spread of infections. These include good personal hygiene, cleaning, thorough cooking, minimizing any handling of food, avoiding cross-contamination and discarding food which is suspected of any contamination. Food on open buffets or shared snacks in a bar area are a particular concern as there is potential for contamination, especially if guests help themselves to food and transfer the virus from their contaminated hands.

Overview

Covid 19 is highly contagious and infection leads to unpleasant symptoms, especially for the vulnerable groups in the community. Those in countries with poor hygiene standards and without access to clean drinking water are at risk of serious dehydration. Although good hygiene practices are recognized as reducing the spread of the infection, we are still learning from the experiences of those who have to deal with Covid 19 outbreaks and we continue to be surprised by the resilience of the virus when it is outside the body.