

Position statement from G-I-N Africa members on the transmission and prevention of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

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The Guideline International Network (G-I-N) Africa community aims to reduce the burden of the challenging global pandemic of *Covid-19* by providing relevant health education and sensitization to the general population. The G-I-N Africa community leverages on the tenet that effective health prevention and promotion is a shared responsibility of the health authorities, researchers and health educators, health care providers and the client/patient. Evolving data on *Covid-19* is dynamic and there is the absence of compelling evidence on the prevention, management and treatment of the disease. Furthermore, the myriads of circulating information including fake news on *Covid-19* are conflicting and may impact negatively on the populace as a result of misinformation.

Consequently in order to mitigate these challenges, the G-I-N Africa community proposes a series of information sheets to enlighten the public through knowledge translation based on available data on the transmission, prevention, treatment and management of *Covid-19*.

The first in this series focuses on prevention strategies encompassing understanding the transmission and practices to curb and even stop the spread of *Covid-19* in Africa. The overall purpose of this paper is to provide information that is simple to understand and assist a lay person to appreciate the rationale for change in daily practices to prevent *Covid-19* and its spread.

HOW COVID-19 IS SPREAD

For *Covid-19* to infect a healthy individual and spread, three (03) main components are needed to make this happen. The first component is the infectious or pathogenic agent that causes the disease (*Covid-19*), the second component is the host or target of the disease (human being) and the third being the environment (condition external to the host). The continuous interaction

between these components favours the spread of *Covid-19*. A good understanding of this concept will enable individuals to adopt positive health behaviour and practices to slow or stop the spread of *Covid-19*.

The following paragraphs examine the components and the transmission of *Covid-19*, with recommendations based on the opinion of G-I-N Africa community on its prevention.

1. **The pathogenic agent:** *Covid-19* is caused by the new virus popularly called coronavirus. Coronaviruses are small infectious agents that can not be seen with the naked eyes but can live on surfaces of materials but only grow and multiply in the human body.
2. **The host:** The host for *Covid-19* is the human being where the virus can thrive and multiply. The virus can gain access into the human body through the mouth, eyes, nostrils and open wounds through the skin. After entering the body, it can take 2-14 days in some individuals to develop symptoms. During this period the host is capable of spreading *Covid-19*. Everyone can be infected by the coronavirus. However, some people are more susceptible to having more severe forms of the disease such as the elderly, people with co-existing chronic conditions (hypertension, diabetes) and people with poor immune systems naturally or due to infections like HIV-AIDS. Those with good immune system can be infected without any obvious signs and symptoms but can spread the virus to other people especially to the aforementioned subgroups above.
3. **The environment:** The *Covid-19* virus can survive in and on a variety of materials from where it can be transmitted to infect healthy human-beings. These include infected humans where it can actually reproduce, air, materials and surfaces in your car, door handles, phones, watches, table surfaces, laptops, office materials etc.
4. **Transmission of covid-19:** The two main ways of transmission are from an infected person to a non-infected person (direct transmission) and through contaminated objects (indirect transmission).
 - **Direct transmission:** *occurs when nasal and oral secretions from an infected patient ejected during a cough, sneeze or when talking enters the mouth, eyes or nose of a non-infected persons. Also, when an infected person sneezes or coughs ejecting droplets into an open space which are later inhaled by a non-infected person.*
 - **Indirect transmission:** *This occurs when a person touches a contaminated object or material carrying the virus and later introduces it to the mouth, eyes or nose.*
5. **Sign and symptoms:** Mild symptoms include fever, dry cough, headache sore throat etc. Moderate to severe symptoms include difficulty in breathing, generalized weakness or fatigue, diarrhea or frequent stool etc.

Recommendations

Self notification, access to medical services and testing

- All individuals with fever, cough and tiredness that have been in contact with a confirmed *Covid-19* case or health care professional taking care of *Covid-19* patients, or recent travel from a town/city with high number of *Covid-19* cases or themselves highly suspecting *Covid-19* should call the toll free number in their country for an on the phone consultation.
- All suspected cases with fever, cough, difficulty breathing and tiredness should seek medical attention *immediately*.
- All suspected cases considering hospital admission *should* alert the ambulance service and the host hospital that a *Covid-19* case *is being* considered prior to leaving for the *hospital*.
- All suspected and *Covid-19* cases are strongly discouraged from using public transport or taxis to the hospital as means of transport.
- All suspected cases should maintain contact and airborne precautions to avoid infecting others and testing should be done as soon as possible.

Hand washing/Disinfection

- Everyone should wash their hands frequently with running water and soap especially after touching exposed objects, materials or surfaces. A thorough hand wash should take not less than twenty (20) seconds.
- Hand sanitizer should be applied to hands in the absence of an accessible source of clean running water and soap.
- Its a strong recommendation to prioritise proper and frequent handwashing with soap under running water over the use of hand sanitizers.
- Appropriate hand washing technique and the use of hand sanitizer should be used complementarily
- Hands should be washed when leaving or arriving at a new environment.

Facemasks

- The use of face mask is mandatory for all confirmed and suspected cases. This is crucial to protect against spreading the infected oral and nasal secretions in the environment which in turn generate more reservoirs increasing the risk of spread.
- All individuals with respiratory signs and symptoms coughing and or sneezing without any facemask should do so on the inside of the elbow or into a

disposable tissue to avoid sending content into the air or other surfaces that can act as potential reservoirs except otherwise disinfected.

- Facemasks are protective to contain nasal and oral secretions or prevent such secretions going in the mouth, eyes and nostrils of a non-infected individual. However, it is important to note that a contaminated facemask with the viruses can still gain access into the mouth, eyes, and nose if standard hygienic precautions are not maintained.
- The use of facemasks is mandatory to all persons leaving their homes for any social activity.
- All disposable facemasks should be treated as contaminated material after use and thrown into the appropriate trash bin.
- Reusable facemasks made out of durable fabric should always be treated as potential reservoirs and should be sterilized before reusing. (Common sterilization methods that can be employed in the community includes but not limited to use of hot water, disinfectant and or ironing).

Social distancing /confinement

- All individuals should avoid physical group meetings and respect the social distancing prescribed by the government and global health authorities.
- Confinement at home is strongly recommended for all except for the purpose of obtaining basic necessities like food and medicine which must be as infrequent as possible.

Family and friends

- All *Covid-19* cases should stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or through social media for moral and social support.
- All individuals should get involve in physical activities and light exercises at home most days of the week to remain active.