Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19)
(Updated 2 April 2020)
Source: some information in this Q&A was taken from the World Health Organization (WHO) website

Disclaimers and Definitions:
- This Q&A is for outreach/front line workers as a reference to address questions from refugees.
- This Q&A is not to be distributed to refugees although it is accessible in www.refugees-lebanon.org where refugees can view it.
- This Q&A is also to be used for all available humanitarian hotlines in Lebanon.
- This Q&A is the base for counselling families at Reception Centers

Important: Always check the date of this Q&A for regular updates!

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1. General information about coronavirus and prevention measures

1. What is a coronavirus?
Coronaviruses are viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections.

2. What is COVID-19?
COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

3. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, breathing difficulties and/or dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don’t develop any symptoms and don’t feel unwell.

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness.

4. How does COVID-19 spread?
People can catch COVID-19 from other persons who have the virus. 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 exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe-in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 meter away from a person who is sick.
Studies suggest that the virus causing COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets rather than through the air.

The risk of catching COVID-19 from someone with no symptoms at all is very low. However, many people with COVID-19 experience only mild symptoms. This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is therefore possible to catch COVID-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill.

The risk of catching COVID-19 from the feces of an infected person appears to be low. While initial investigations suggest the virus may be present in feces in some cases, spread through this route is not a main feature of the outbreak. Because this is a risk, however, it is another reason to clean hands regularly, after using the bathroom and before eating.

5. What can I do to protect myself and prevent the spread of disease?
Most people who become infected experience mild illness and recover, but it can be more severe for others. Take care of your health and protect others by doing the following or see chart in Q13:

- **Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands** with soap and water for 20 seconds or, if you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
  **Why?** Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

You can also see these videos from UNICEF for clarifications on effective ways to wash your hands: [https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/en/news/275/information-on-coronavirus](https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/en/news/275/information-on-coronavirus)

- **Maintain at least 1 meter distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.**
  **Why?** When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

- **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.**
  **Why?** Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

- **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 in the garbage bin.
  **Why?** Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

6. How likely am I to catch COVID-19?
The risk of infection is higher in areas where a number people have been diagnosed with COVID-19. The outbreak started in China, but since February 2020, there have been an increase of cases reported from many other countries all over the world. If you have the symptoms described above and have recently (within 14 days) travelled to area country where there are many COVID-19 cases reported, or if you have been in contact with someone who has recently travelled to such an area or is confirmed having COVID-19, you might have COVID-19 and should call 01-594459 for information on what to do.

The countries currently reported with high cases of COVID-19 are: France, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, Italy, Iran, China (Hong Kong, Macao, Chinese Taiwan) and South Korea.

7. Are antibiotics effective in preventing or treating COVID-19?
No. Antibiotics do not work against viruses, they only work on bacterial infections, while COVID-19 is caused by a virus. Antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment of COVID-19. They should only be used as directed by a physician to treat a bacterial infection.
8. Is there a vaccine, drug or treatment for COVID-19?
Not yet. To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19. However, those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. People with serious illness should be hospitalized. Most patients recover thanks to supportive care.

9. Should I wear a mask?
The WHO recommends the use of masks only for people who have symptoms of COVID-19 and for those caring for individuals who have symptoms.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently wash your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue (and immediately throw the used tissue in a dustbin) and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from people who are coughing or sneezing.
For more information on protective measures against COVID-19, please consult:
MoPH: https://www.moph.gov.lb/
WHO: https://www.who.int/ar/home
UNHCR: www.refugees-lebanon.org

You can also see these videos from UNICEF for clarifications on effective ways to wash your hands:

10. How long is the ‘incubation period’ for COVID-19?
The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. 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. Can humans be infected with COVID-19 from an animal source?
Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in animals. Rarely, people get infected with these viruses which may then spread to other people. Possible animal sources of COVID-19 have not yet been confirmed.
To protect yourself, such as when visiting live animal markets, avoid direct contact with animals and surfaces in contact with animals. Ensure good food safety practices at all times. Handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care to avoid contamination of uncooked foods and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.

12. What are the instructions from the Lebanese authorities?
Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Lebanese authorities have issued several instructions to the population, institutions, organisations and private businesses on how we all can help prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. It is important to follow these instructions, as it can help protect you from becoming infected, and from transmitting the virus to someone else in case you are infected with COVID-19. We can all contribute to containing the spread of COVID-19!

The latest instruction was issued on 15 March, when the Government declared a state of general mobilization until 31 March 2020. This includes the following:

- Obligation for everyone to remain in their homes and not go outside and move around except when absolutely necessary. Older persons and others with medical conditions who make them at heightened risk of infection have been especially urged to stay at home and limit their movement.
• Prohibition of gatherings in different public and private places.

• Closure of Rafic Hariri International Airport and all air, sea and land ports from Wednesday, 18 March until midnight of Sunday 29 March 2020. Sea and land borders will however remain open for those exiting Lebanon.

• Visa applications from Syrians to enter Lebanon will be suspended as of 12 March 2020 for a period of 10 days. As of 16 March and until 23 March, Syrians will not be allowed (re-) entry to Lebanon from Syria, neither for stay nor transit. Syrians can return to Lebanon until 16 March 2020 only if they are: a) Holders of annual or permanent residency permit (workers and non-workers) and b) Holders of a valid sponsorship visa (workers and non-workers) or under property owner or lease agreement visa.

• Closure of public departments, institutions, municipalities and their unions, independent departments, nurseries, schools and universities.

• The Government has assigned different authorities, including the security forces and municipalities, the responsibility to ensure the implementation of this obligation.

The texts of the relevant Government decisions are available here:
https://www.facebook.com/522102931473184/posts/1121726154844189/

13. Is the border between Lebanon and Syria closed?
On 22 March 2020, the Syrian Interior Ministry announced that all crossing points have been closed for arrivals from Lebanon as part of the steps to confront the Coronavirus (COVID-19). This decision includes Syrian citizens and only excludes cargo trucks after going through the check against Covid-19.

The decision is enforced starting 12PM on 22/3/2020 and until further notice.

You can see the news here:
https://www.sana.sy/en/?p=188685

14. How do I get updates about the COVID-19 situation?
During such outbreaks, the situation can evolve rapidly and the advice on what to do might change. Please check regularly for updated information from official sources. On the following websites you can get updates on the COVID-19 situation in Lebanon:

MoPH: https://www.moph.gov.lb/
https://www.moph.gov.lb/en/Pages/11/7882/%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AD-%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%A9#en/view/25580/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-
WHO: https://www.who.int/ar/home
UNHCR: www.refugees-lebanon.org

IMPORTANT: Inaccurate or fraudulent information about the COVID-19 is often circulating throughout news and social media, which can spread anxiety and fear and make people more vulnerable to catching the virus. If you are unsure about some information, always check the links provided above or contact the organizations listed at the end of this document. Stay informed! See `Myth Busters` section at the end of this document.

15. What do I do if I believe that I have COVID-19 symptoms or if I think I have been exposed?
• If you have any of the symptoms mentioned in Q3 above (fever, breathing difficulties and/or dry cough, tiredness, aches and pains), or
• If you have arrived from a country where COVID-19 was reported, or you believe you were in contact with someone coming from these countries (mentioned in Q6):

Call immediately the Ministry of Public Health on 01-594459. They will ask you questions to help establish if you might be infected with COVID-19 and tell you want to do. Avoid going to a hospital prior calling the MoPH hotline.

For easier understanding on what to do see this chart below

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16. When and where can I get tested and/or treated for COVID-19?
You need to call MoPH on 01-594459 for advice. The MoPH will tell you on the phone where to go for test and eventually for treatment if you are tested positive of COVID-19.

For tests: There are several health care providers in Lebanon that offers COVID-19 tests, but currently, only tests that have been prescribed by the MoPH are free of charge.

For treatment: Currently, the main treatment centre for COVID-19 is Rafic Hariri University Hospital in Beirut, but more hospitals are being prepared to receive patients.

17. Is testing and/or treatment for COVID-19 free of charge for refugees?
Testing and treatment for COVID-19 is currently provided free of charge at the Rafic Hariri University Hospital in Beirut for individuals who have been prescribed this following a call to the MoPH hotline 01-594459 and MoPH screening. If you take a test for COVID-19 in another hospital or medical facility, you will need to pay yourself.
You are therefore advised to first call the MoPH hotline on 01-594459 for a screening and advice where to go for testing, if required.

IMPORTANT: If you have any questions regarding payment for tests and treatment for COVID-19 by UNHCR, please call NEXICARE: 01504020.

18. How can I go to a hospital for testing and/or treatment for COVID-19?
If you have been advised by the MoPH hotline 01-594459 to go to a hospital to take the COVID-19 test, you may be provided with transport by the Lebanese Red Cross if you have severe symptoms (high fever and/or difficulty breathing).

If you have been advised by the MoPH to go to hospital to take the COVID-19 test but you do not have severe symptoms, then you can be driven by a family member or a taxi (both driver and patient should wear face-masks) or drive yourself.

19. I am afraid to report symptoms of COVID-19, what should I do?
It is very important, for your health and the health of others, to contact the MoPH hotline if you have symptoms of COVID-19. If you are worried about reporting, please contact UNHCR on the numbers below for protection counselling and advice on what support can be provided in your specific case.

20. If I would like, is it still possible to return to Syria even if the borders are closed? Is the GSO still facilitating returns to Syria in groups?
You can still register your interest to return to Syria with the assistance of the GSO by approaching or contacting the GSO office in your area to inquire about the dates for upcoming movements.

If you are considering to return to Syria and need information about your preparation, please call UNHCR on the numbers below.

3. UNHCR and partners’ role

21. What is UNHCR doing to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19?
Prevention measures are being taken, including enhanced cleaning and disinfection routines of all reception places, increased availability of disinfectant gels, distribution of soap, etc.

UNHCR and partners are providing information through broad social media channels, SMS, and small group awareness sessions on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

In order to protect yourself and your family from Coronavirus (COVID-19), and as a precautionary measure following the Government’s instructions, UNHCR is temporarily suspending activities in the Reception Centers and at Community Development Centers.

However, phone counselling capacities are increased. Therefore if you need documentation, information or have compelling or urgent protection, assistance, health or other issues, please call UNHCR on the numbers below.

22. I already have an appointment to come to the Reception Center, what do I do?
If you and your family already had an appointment date to come to the Reception Center, UNHCR will contact you to postpone the date of your appointment. In case you are not contacted by UNHCR please call us (see contacts at the end of this document).

If you have changed your phone number, please URGENTLY inform UNHCR by phone or you can send us an email to lebbe@unhcr.org. If you do not do so, UNHCR will not be able to contact you.

23. What do I do if my UNHCR documents have expired and I have a medical emergency?
You can call NEXtCARE or approach a NEXICARE delegate in a contracted hospital and it can be arranged without the need to go to the UNHCR Reception Center.

**Myth Busters**

Facts about COVID-19 addressing some of the rumours and myths


- COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in areas with hot and humid climates—Cold weather and snow cannot kill
- COVID-19-Taking a hot bath does not prevent COVID-19-
- COVID-19 cannot be transmitted through goods manufactured in China or any country reporting COVID-19 cases
- COVID-19 cannot be transmitted through mosquito bites
- Hand dryers are not effective in killing COVID-19
- Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body will not kill viruses that have already entered your body.
- Spraying alcohol or chlorine over your body can be harmful to you
- Garlic is a healthy food, however, there is no evidence that eating garlic will protect you from COVID-19
- Swallowing or gargling with bleach, taking acetic acid or steroids, or using essential oils, saltwater, ethanol or other substances will not protect you from getting COVID-19 and can be harmful
- COVID-19 can make anyone sick, regardless of their race or ethnicity
- Someone who has completed quarantine does not pose a risk of infection to other people
- Smoking is not effective against COVID-19 and can be harmful

**CONTACTS**

MoPH: If you have symptoms (fever, cough, nasal cough, sore throat, shortness of breath) within 14 days of coming from an area where new cases have been registered, please call 01-594459.

Lebanese Red Cross: 140 - – 24 hours 7/7 days

NEXtCARE Lebanon: 01504020 – 24 hours 7/7 days

UNHCR Hotlines:

- Beirut/Mount Lebanon: 01-820848 (Monday to Friday 7:00 - 17:00)
- Bekaa: 7661811, 81477248, 81477249, 81477250, 81477251, 81477252 (Monday to Friday 8:30 - 16:00)
- North: 06-205003 (Monday to Friday 8:00 - 16:00)
- South: 76500370, 76500380, 76421637, 76421562 (Monday to Friday 8:30am-4pm)
- Lebanon: 01-594250 (Monday to Friday 8am-5pm)