

# CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

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# COVID-19: WHAT DO PATIENTS NEED TO KNOW?

## WHAT IS CORONAVIRUS / COVID-19 DISEASE?

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that was identified in Wuhan, China towards the end of 2019. The disease caused by this virus is known as COVID-19. It has since spread to all continents, and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020. Widespread community transmission of the virus is currently occurring in South Africa.



## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 may have no symptoms, mild to moderate symptoms or severe symptoms. Flu-like symptoms typically develop from 5 to 7 days, but as many as 14 days after becoming infected with the virus.



As stated in the NICD suspected COVID-19 case definition\* below, the most common symptoms include cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, anosmia (loss of sense of smell) or dysgeusia (alteration of sense of taste), with or without other symptoms (which may include fever, weakness, myalgia or diarrhoea).



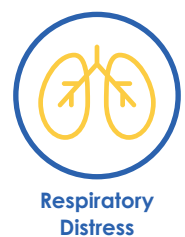
The elderly, those with chronic medical conditions (such as chronic heart or lung disease, diabetics, high blood pressure, chronic kidney and liver disease), the immune compromised (due to disease or treatment), pregnant women, and other chronic diseases including Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis and motor neuron disease, are all vulnerable and at high risk for severe COVID-19 infection that may require hospitalisation.



## HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM INFECTION WITH COVID-19?

The following simple measures will help protect you and your family from infection:

- Social distancing - stay at least 1.5 - 2m away from people & avoid close contact with people who are symptomatic;
- Not touching your eyes, mouth or nose;
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water and / or an alcohol based hand sanitiser (containing at least 60% alcohol);
- Medical masks are in limited supply and should be reserved for healthcare workers. If you are out in public, it is recommended wearing a fabric mask, buff or scarf. This may provide some protection for yourself, and if you are infected it will limit the spread of the virus to others.



## SHOULD I GET VACCINATED FOR INFLUENZA?

Currently there is no vaccine available for protection against COVID-19, however it is highly recommended that all South Africans have an influenza vaccination, which offers some protection in that it may offset the "double whammy" of contracting both viruses at the same time.

## WHEN SHOULD I GO FOR A COVID-19 TEST?

You will be referred by your doctor for a COVID-19 PCR test should you meet the NICD case definition\* for suspected COVID-19 and/or before admission to hospital. This is a highly accurate test that detects the genetic material of the COVID-19 virus.

It is important to note that many individuals with active COVID-19 will have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, but are nevertheless infectious to others. Therefore, in order to identify these individuals, hospitals in SA have instituted mandatory testing for COVID-19 before admission in order to minimize the risk of infection to other patients and the healthcare workers in the hospital.

\*The NICD suspected COVID-19 case definition is: Any person presenting with an acute ( $\leq 14$  days) respiratory tract infection or other clinical illness compatible with COVID-19, or an asymptomatic person who is a close contact<sup>1</sup> of a confirmed<sup>2</sup> case

- Symptoms include ANY of the following respiratory symptoms: cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, anosmia (loss of sense of smell) or dysgeusia (alteration of sense of taste), with or without other symptoms (which may include fever, weakness, myalgia or diarrhoea)
- NOTE: Asymptomatic close contacts should not be routinely tested despite meeting the suspected case definition. However, testing may be indicated in certain circumstances e.g. institutions such as care homes

<sup>1</sup>Close contact:

- A person having had face-to-face contact ( $\leq 1$  meter) or who has been in a closed space with a confirmed case for at least 15 minutes. This includes, amongst others, all persons living in the same household as a case, and people working closely in the same environment as a case.
- Healthcare workers or other people providing direct care for a case, while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) e.g. gowns, gloves, N95 respirator and eye protection.
- A contact in an aircraft sitting within 2 seats (in any direction) of the case, travel companions or persons providing care, and crew members serving in the section of the aircraft where the case was seated.

<sup>2</sup>Confirmed case:

- A person with laboratory confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 infection (using an RT-PCR assay), irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms.
- Symptomatic cases are considered infectious from 2 – 3 days before symptom onset to 14 days after symptom onset.

## SHOULD I BE REFERRED FOR A COVID-19 TEST BY MY DOCTOR?

Yes you should. Contact your doctor telephonically if you suddenly develop any of the symptoms mentioned above, or flu-like illness, especially after having had contact with a person with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection. Your doctor will determine whether you should go into his consulting rooms or whether he will consult with you telephonically. If your doctor suspects that you have been exposed to COVID-19, the doctor may refer you for a COVID-19 test directly, to prevent possible risk of exposure to the doctor's consulting room staff and other patients should you be COVID-19 positive.

If your doctor refers you for COVID-19 testing and once you have had your sample taken, you should go straight home and self-quarantine until you receive your result.

If you suddenly fall very ill with the above symptoms, you may need to immediately go to your local hospital's casualty department as you may be required to be admitted to hospital.

## WHERE CAN I GO TO HAVE MY SAMPLE TAKEN AND WHAT ARE THEIR WORKING HOURS?

The Ampath Laboratories website [www.ampath.co.za](http://www.ampath.co.za) has a "COVID-19 - What Patients Should Know" banner that pops up on the homepage. Click on this and the second page will contain all the relevant information.

Not all the Ampath Depots are available for COVID-19 sample collections due to the risk of exposure to other vulnerable patients. Collection of samples for a COVID-19 PCR test are performed only at special designated COVID-19 sample collection sites. The information on these sites is available on the Ampath website. Click on the "Collection Sites" tab on the right hand side of the page and a list of all the COVID-19 designated collection sites, their addresses and working hours can be viewed.

## WHICH DOCUMENTS MUST I BRING WITH ME TO HAVE MY SAMPLE TAKEN?

You need to bring two forms with you to the COVID-19 sample collection site:

- **An Ampath test request form:**

Your doctor should give you an Ampath test request form requesting a COVID-19 test. Please complete all your personal details, address and medical aid information on this form prior to going to the collection site. Your doctor may perform an electronic order for you after your first consult, this will then allow you to complete these forms including the Contact Tracing form electronically. It will provide you with an electronic order number that you must bring with you, and provide to the nursing staff at the sample collection site.

- **A NICD Contact Tracing Form:**

This crucial form is required by the NICD and Department of Health and is sent to them together with your test results by Ampath. This allows them to trace your contacts should you test positive for the COVID-19 virus. Before coming to the sample collection site, you must record all the people that you have been in close contact with from 72 hours prior to the onset of your symptoms, or, to the date that you are having the sample collected in the case of hospital pre-admission testing.

- **A Mask:**

For your safety and that of the collection site staff, please ensure that you are wearing your mask when you arrive at the collection site.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I ARRIVE AT A COVID-19 SAMPLE COLLECTION SITE?

Some COVID-19 sample collection sites are "drive through" sites where you will be required to stay in your vehicle and the nursing staff will do the administration and collect your sample whilst you are in your vehicle. Whereas at other sites, you will be required to exit your vehicle to be attended to at the collection site structure (which may be in a temporary structure reserved specifically for this purpose).

The staff at these sites will be wearing full PPE (personal protective equipment) such as disposable hazmat suits, aprons, masks, and gloves. They will also wear either face visors or safety goggles. They will discard their gloves after each sample collection and put on new disposable gloves for each patient.

They will require you to sanitise your hands and wear your mask while they perform the administration tasks and take payment. They will ask you to remove your mask only when taking the sample, after which you will need to replace your mask and re-sanitise your hands before leaving the sample collection site.

## WHAT SAMPLE IS TAKEN FOR THE COVID-19 TEST?

COVID-19 PCR tests require either a nasopharyngeal swab, a nasal midturbinate swab, a nasal swab or an oropharyngeal swab.

The collection of the nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal sample may be slightly uncomfortable, but the actual swabbing only takes a few seconds.

Please note that as the COVID-19 infection rate increases throughout South Africa and the number of people requiring COVID-19 testing increases, these collection sites are becoming extremely busy so delays are anticipated due the high volumes of patients turning up for testing.

## WHAT IS THE PRICE OF A COVID-19 TEST?

The cost of the COVID-19 test is R850.00 incl. VAT. The various payment methods are:

- Paying via EFT prior to coming to the sample collection site and bring your proof of payment with you. If this is your preference, please use your ID number as a reference number on this EFT payment. The AMPATH banking details are available on the Ampath website at: [www.ampath.co.za/accounts/efts](http://www.ampath.co.za/accounts/efts)
- Pay R850.00 at the time of sample collection either by debit or credit card, or by cash. If you are paying by cash, please pay with the exact amount as the collection site will not have change available.
- If a member of a medical aid scheme, check upfront if they will pay for the test. Some medical aids pay from risk benefits and some pay from savings.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DO THE TEST?

The test result should be available within 72 to 96 hours depending on the patient priority (ill hospitalised patients and health care workers will be given priority), the travel distance between the sample collection site and the testing laboratory, and the volume of tests at the performing laboratory.

## **CAN I RECEIVE MY OWN COVID-19 RESULTS?**

Yes. You will be able to receive your COVID-19 result and other laboratory results if you register for Patient Results on our AMPATH website [www.ampath.co.za/my-lab-results](http://www.ampath.co.za/my-lab-results)

## **WILL MY DOCTOR RECEIVE MY COVID-19 RESULT?**

Yes. Your doctor will receive a SMS as soon as your result has been released. Your doctor will guide you through what you need to do should you test COVID-19 positive.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19?**

A positive COVID-19 PCR result confirms that you are infected with SARS-CoV-2 and that you are infective and possibly spreading the virus to other people. Your doctor will contact you to discuss the implications and the next steps to take, whether this be to self-isolate at home and/or on your planned hospital admission should your test have been for pre-hospital admission purposes.

As COVID-19 is a Category 1 Notifiable Medical Condition, all doctors are legally required to notify the Department of Health of positive patients in their care. Ampath will also send your results and the Contact Tracing form to the NICD and Department of Health. The Department of Health will contact you as they are responsible for ensuring isolation and contact tracing of all persons who test positive.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF I TEST NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19?**

A negative COVID-19 PCR result means that you are unlikely to have active COVID-19 disease (do not have the virus); OR you are early in your infection and are already infectious, and the test will become positive after a few days.

It is important to understand that you can become infected with COVID-19 after the sample was taken, and that subjects with active COVID-19 infection (many of whom have no or only mild symptoms) can test negative during the course of their infection (as outlined below). Thus, even if you test negative, you should still take precautions to protect yourself and others as a negative result does not mean that you do not have COVID-19, only that the virus was not detected in the sample submitted.

## **WHAT HAPPENS IF I TEST COVID-19 POSITIVE BUT AM WELL AND DO NOT DISPLAY ANY SYMPTOMS? SHOULD I HAVE A SECOND TEST TO CHECK?**

No. Many infected individuals do not have symptoms, and the potential for a positive result in someone that is not infected (a false positive test result) is extremely unlikely. It is far more likely to have a false negative result than a false positive.

A negative COVID-19 result in a second test will not invalidate the positive result of the first test, as a negative test result is much less reliable than a positive result. This is because of the ever-present potential for inadequate sampling, in addition to intermittent shedding of the virus in COVID-19 positive patients, hence a specimen taken at the time when the virus is not actively being shed can give a false negative result.



Therefore, there is no point in having a second test to check the first positive result, given the likelihood of a false negative result of the second test.

It is in the interests of your own health and the health of those with whom you are in contact with that a positive test result be managed as such even if you have NO symptoms.

Should you have any queries regarding your COVID-19 test result, please contact your Doctor or consult the CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/diagnostic-testing.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/diagnostic-testing.html)

If you are infected and are asymptomatic i.e. you show no symptoms, you must stay at home and self-isolate for 14 days from the date of your COVID-19 positive test. If you have mild symptoms, you must stay at home and self-isolate for 14 days from when your symptoms started. In the case of severe respiratory illness or severe shortness of breath you need to immediately consult with your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency unit.

## **IF SELF-ISOLATING AT HOME, TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 TO OTHER PEOPLE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD:**

- You should stay in a specific room and use your own bathroom (if possible). You should avoid unnecessary travel and unnecessary contact with other people.
- Where contact is unavoidable, you should wear a facemask, and maintain a distance of at least 1 metre (preferably 2 metres) from other people.
- You should clean your hands with soap and water frequently. Alcohol based sanitizers may also be used, provided they contain at least 60% alcohol.
- You should practice good cough and sneeze hygiene, by using a tissue, and then immediately discarding the tissue in a lined trash can, followed by washing your hands immediately.
- You should not have visitors in your home. Only those who live in your home should be allowed to stay.
- At home, you should stay in a specific room and use your own bathroom (if possible). If you live in shared accommodation (university halls of residence or similar) with a communal kitchen, bathroom(s) and living area, you should stay in your room with the door closed, only coming out when necessary, wearing a facemask if you do so.
- You should avoid sharing household items like dishes, cups, eating utensils and towels. After using any of these, the items should be thoroughly washed with soap and hot water.
- All high-touch surfaces like table tops, counters, toilets, phones, computers, etc. should be appropriately and frequently cleaned. If you need to wash laundry at home before the results are available, then you should wash all laundry at the highest temperature compatible for the fabric using laundry detergent. This should be above 60°C.

If possible, you should tumble dry and iron using the highest setting compatible with the fabric. Disposable gloves and a plastic apron should be used when handling soiled materials, if possible, and all surfaces and the area around the washing machine should be cleaned. Laundry should not be taken to a laundrette. You should wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling dirty laundry (remove gloves first if used).

- You should know who to call if you develop any worsening symptoms, so that you can be safely reassessed.

## **IS THERE ANY SPECIFIC TREATMENT FOR COVID-19?**

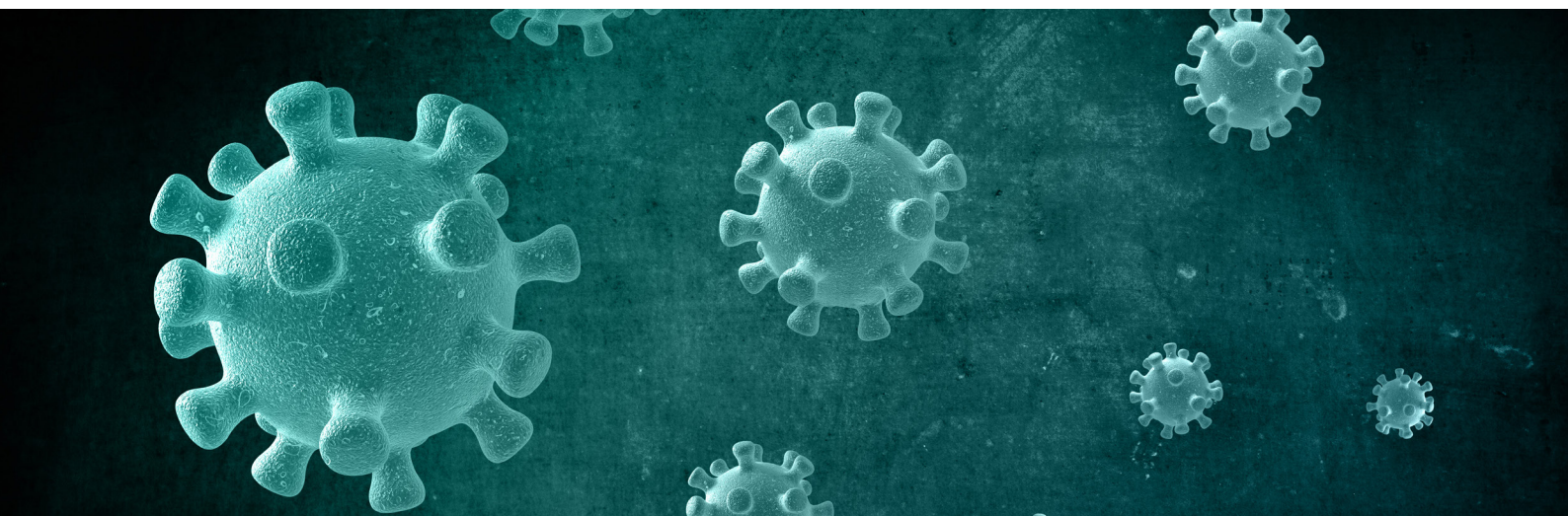
There is no specific antiviral treatment or vaccine for COVID-19. Treatment is supportive to relieve symptoms. Severe infections require admission to hospital.

## **WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19?**

The Ampath website [www.ampath.co.za](http://www.ampath.co.za) has a "COVID-19 What Patients Should Know" banner on the homepage. Click on this and it will take you to the COVID-19 patient resource and information page.

## **IS THERE A TEST AVAILABLE THAT CAN DETERMINE IF I HAVE ALREADY BEEN INFECTED BY COVID-19?**

COVID-19 antibody tests are available but not yet validated for use in South Africa. Once these have been approved for use by the SA regulatory authority, SAHPRA, Ampath Laboratories will be able to offer these tests.



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