



CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

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We know more than 192 countries across the world are dealing with the Covid infection – including the UK and India.

Statistics show that coronavirus causes mild illness in 82 per cent of those with the virus, severe illness in 15 per cent, critical illness in three per cent and death in 2.3 per cent of cases.

It affects all ages, but predominantly males (56 per cent, and 87 per cent in the 30-79 age bracket).

Incubation is variable, but the mean time to symptoms is five days, the mean time to pneumonia is nine days and mean time to death 14 days.

Clinically, all patients suffer a fever, 75 per cent have a cough; 50 per cent weakness and 50 per cent breathlessness.

The elderly and the sick are particularly at risk because they may have an immune response that is dangerous. It's called a "cytokine storm," when immune cells are overproduced and flood into the lungs, causing pneumonia, inflammation and shortness of breath.

People with mild cases recover in about two weeks, while those who are sicker can take anywhere from three to six weeks to get better.

COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, which means it is mandatory to report to the WHO each human and animal case.

The spread of coronavirus from person to person is predominantly from droplets of saliva or mucus from coughing or sneezing, or through viral particles transferred when shaking hands or sharing a drink with someone who has the virus.

Hence the answer for the public and health workers is to limit close contact.

We need to recognise that the virus is advancing and so it is really important to try and take the heat out of transmission, and that means helping people to stay further away from each other and reduce the risk of infection.

Very importantly, if you have symptoms that suggest you might have Covid, you absolutely must not be in contact with others.

We must then look at the staging of events. Some are

already being cancelled, but it is not just big events. Gatherings in community halls, in religious spaces and services, and also in pubs will all be scrutinised by the Government in an effort to continue the delay of the spread of the virus.

It's time for facts, not fear; for rationality, not rumours and for solidarity, not stigma.

Precautions for the general public are:

- Strict self-quarantine if sick with flu like illness: Two weeks.
- Wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching: Eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact: (3-6 feet) with people who are sick with cough or breathlessness
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

What are the different precautions?

- Droplet precautions: Three-layer surgical mask by patients, their contacts and health care workers, in an adequately ventilated isolation room, health care workers while caring with the secretions should use eye protection, face shields/goggles. One should limit patient movement, restrict attendants and observe hand hygiene.
- Contact precautions: When entering room - gown, mask, goggles, gloves – remove before leaving the room; Dedicated equipment/ disinfection after every use; Care for environment- door knobs, handles, articles, laundry;

- Avoid patient transport and Hand hygiene
- Airborne precautions when handling virus in the lab and while performing aerosol-generating procedures: Room should be with negative pressure with minimum of 12 air changes per hour or at least 160 litres/second/ patient in facilities with natural ventilation. There should be restricted movement of other people and all should use gloves, long-sleeved gowns, eye protection, and fit-tested particulate respirators (N95 or equivalent, or higher level of protection)

If you have respiratory symptoms like coughing or sneezing, experts recommend wearing a mask to protect others. This may help contain droplets containing any type of virus, including the flu, and protect close contacts (anyone within three to six feet of the infected person).

And finally,

The pandemic has also highlighted the fact that the population of the UK/India, like that of many nations, is in a poor state of health, with conditions such as diabetes and obesity prevalent.

Improving lifestyle, increasing exercise and eating more healthily will improve our ability to fight off this and other infections. As a quick step, heavy doses of vitamin C will help boost the immune system. □

Dr. Kailash Chand OBE is the first Asian honorary vice president of the BMA. He has been a BMA activist, Deputy chair of the BMA council (2012 to 2016), an NHS public health campaigner for the last two decades and has served on various BMA committees including the General Medical Council working group (2006 to present), General Practitioners Committee (1999 to 2009); and as Vice chair of the Equality Opportunities Committee (2007 to 2009). Dr. Chand was awarded an OBE for services to the NHS and health care and for the last five years he was named by Pulse magazine as one of Britain's 50 best doctors for helping to shape health care.

