

COVID-19: Myth vs. Reality

While we are overwhelmed with information about the novel coronavirus and the outbreak of the disease as a result of it, COVID-19, it is important to take a moment to verify the authenticity of such information in the interest of safety.

Here are some myths or misinformation that is being propagated and the realities we should be aware of:

MYTH: COVID-19 virus cannot be transmitted in areas with hot and humid climates

REALITY: From the evidence so far, the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in ALL AREAS, including areas with hot and humid weather. Regardless of climate, adopt protective measures if you live in, or travel to an area reporting COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.

MYTH: Cold weather and snow can kill the new coronavirus

REALITY: There is no reason to believe that cold weather can kill the new coronavirus or other diseases. The normal human body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the external temperature or weather. The most effective way to protect yourself against the new coronavirus is by frequently cleaning your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water.

MYTH: Taking a hot bath prevents the new coronavirus disease

REALITY: Taking a hot bath will not prevent you from catching COVID-19. Your normal body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the temperature of your bath or shower. Actually, taking a hot bath with extremely hot water can be harmful, as it can burn you. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.

MYTH: The new coronavirus can be transmitted through mosquito bites

REALITY: To date there has been no information nor evidence to suggest that the new coronavirus could be transmitted by mosquitoes. The new coronavirus is a respiratory virus which spreads primarily through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose. To protect yourself, clean your hands frequently with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Also, avoid close contact with anyone who is coughing and sneezing.

MYTH: Hand dryers effective in killing the new coronavirus

REALITY: No. Hand dryers are not effective in killing the 2019-nCoV. To protect yourself against the new coronavirus, you should frequently clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Once your hands are cleaned, you should dry them thoroughly by using paper towels or a warm air dryer.

MYTH: An ultraviolet disinfection lamp can kill the new coronavirus

REALITY: UV lamps should not be used to sterilize hands or other areas of skin as UV radiation can cause skin irritation

MYTH: Thermal scanners are 100% effective in detecting people infected with the new coronavirus

REALITY: Thermal scanners are effective in detecting people who have developed a fever (i.e. have a higher than normal body temperature) because of infection with the new coronavirus.

However, they cannot detect people who are infected but are not yet sick with fever. This is because it takes between 2 and 10 days before people who are infected become sick and develop a fever.

MYTH: Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body can kill the new coronavirus

REALITY: No. Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body will not kill viruses that have already entered your body. Spraying such substances can be harmful to clothes or mucous membranes (i.e. eyes, mouth). Be aware that both alcohol and chlorine can be useful to disinfect surfaces, but they need to be used under appropriate recommendations.

MYTH: Vaccines against pneumonia protect you against the new coronavirus

REALITY: No. Vaccines against pneumonia, such as pneumococcal vaccine and Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib) vaccine, do not provide protection against the new coronavirus. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Researchers are trying to develop a vaccine against 2019-nCoV, and WHO is supporting their efforts.

Although these vaccines are not effective against 2019-nCoV, vaccination against respiratory illnesses is highly recommended to protect your health.

MYTH: Regularly rinsing your nose with saline can help prevent infection with the new coronavirus

REALITY: No. There is no evidence that regularly rinsing the nose with saline has protected people from infection with the new coronavirus.

There is some limited evidence that regularly rinsing nose with saline can help people recover more quickly from the common cold. However, regularly rinsing the nose has not been shown to prevent respiratory infections.

MYTH: Eating garlic can help prevent infection with the new coronavirus

REALITY: Garlic is a healthy food that may have some antimicrobial properties. However, there is no evidence from the current outbreak that eating garlic has protected people from the new coronavirus.

MYTH: The new coronavirus only affects older people, younger people are not susceptible

REALITY: People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.

WHO advises people of all ages to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, for example by following good hand hygiene and good respiratory hygiene.

MYTH: Antibiotics are effective in preventing and treating the new coronavirus

REALITY: No, antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria.

The new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment.

However, if you are hospitalized for the 2019-nCoV, you may receive antibiotics because bacterial co-infection is possible.

MYTH: There are specific medicines to prevent or treat the new coronavirus

REALITY: To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

However, those infected with the virus should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe illness should receive optimized supportive care. Some specific treatments are under investigation and will be tested through clinical trials. WHO is helping to accelerate research and development efforts with a range of partners.

MYTH: If you can hold your breath for ten seconds without discomfort, you don't have COVID-19

REALITY: Most young patients with Coronavirus will be able to hold their breaths for much longer than 10 seconds. And many elderly without the virus won't be able to do it.

MYTH: Since COVID testing is unavailable, we should donate blood. The blood bank will test for it.

REALITY: No blood bank is testing for Coronavirus so this attempt will fail. Blood donation is a revered exercise; let's make sure we are motivated by the right reasons

MYTH: Coronavirus lives in the throat. So drink lots of water so the virus is pushed into the stomach where the acid will kill it.

REALITY: Virus may gain entry via throat but it penetrates into the host cells. You can't wash it away.

MYTH: Car accidents kill 30,000 people annually. Comparatively, COVID-19 isn't a big deal.

REALITY: Car accidents are not contagious, their fatalities don't double every three days, they don't cause mass panic or a market crash.

MYTH: Hand sanitizers are better than soap and water

REALITY: Wrong. Soap and water actually kills and washes away the virus from skin (it cannot penetrate our skin cells) plus it also cleans visible soiling if hands.

MYTH: One of the best strategies to prevent COVID-19 is to clean every door knob in your home with disinfectants.

REALITY: Wrong. Hand washing/maintaining 6 feet distance is best practice. Unless you're caring for a COVID patient at home, your home surfaces should not be a big risk.

MYTH: I've heard that coronavirus thrives in cold sinuses. So if you blow-dry your nose with warm air, it kills the virus.

REALITY: False! Please don't. Our nose carries bacteria, as part of normal flora. Those bacteria may get confused.

MYTH: Coronavirus can mutate and become airborne

REALITY: No. Even when viruses mutate, their mode of transmission does not change. Influenza virus has mutated many times, but it remains a droplet infection.

MYTH: A vaccine to cure COVID-19 is available

REALITY: There is no vaccine for the new coronavirus right now. Scientists have already begun working on one, but developing a vaccine that is safe and effective in human beings will take many months.

MYTH: The new coronavirus was deliberately created or released by people

REALITY: Viruses can change over time. Occasionally, a disease outbreak happens when a virus that is common in an animal such as a pig, bat or bird undergoes changes and passes to humans. This is likely how the new coronavirus came to be.

MYTH: Ordering or buying products shipped from China will make a person sick.

REALITY: Researchers are studying the new coronavirus to learn more about how it infects people. As of this writing, scientists note that most viruses like this one do not stay alive for very long on surfaces, so it is not likely you would get COVID-19 from a package that was in transit for days or weeks. The illness is most likely transmitted by droplets from an infected person's sneeze or cough, but more information is emerging daily.

MYTH: A face mask will protect you from COVID-19

REALITY: Certain models of professional, tight-fitting respirators (such as the N95) can protect health care workers as they care for infected patients.

For the general public without respiratory illness, wearing lightweight disposable surgical masks is not recommended. Because they don't fit tightly, they may allow tiny infected droplets to get into the nose, mouth or eyes. Also, people with the virus on their hands who touch their face under a mask might become infected.

People with a respiratory illness can wear these masks to lessen their chance of infecting others. Bear in mind that stocking up on masks makes fewer available for sick patients and health care workers who need them.

References

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