

IfE Pandemic Response : FAQ

Q: Isn't it true that the coronavirus pandemic is being exaggerated so that officials can ask for aid money?

A: Look at the number of deaths that have already occurred in the United States, Brazil, Mexico, India and the United Kingdom in the table below. This disease hits poor countries as well as rich countries. Over 750 000 people have already died, and the global economy is being strongly affected. This disease is not being exaggerated. In fact, medical experts have said the true numbers are actually much higher, but have not been counted. The pandemic is much bigger than most people realize, and the World Health Organization (WHO) medical researchers have said it is going to get worse. Is there corruption in the expenditure of funds for COVID? Yes, in some cases that is happening. But this does not mean the pandemic has been exaggerated.

Countries listed by number of counted deaths as of 16 August 2020

#	Country, Other	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Deaths	New Deaths
	World	21,817,641	+212,154	772,751	+4,525
1	USA	5,566,591	+36,802	173,128	+522
2	Brazil	3,340,197	+22,365	107,879	+582
3	Mexico	517,714	+6,345	56,543	+635
4	India	2,647,316	+58,108	51,045	+961
5	UK	318,484	+1,040	41,366	+5
6	Italy	253,915	+479	35,396	+4
7	France	218,536	+3,015	30,410	+1
8	Spain	358,843		28,617	
9	Peru	535,946	+10,143	26,281	+206
10	Iran	343,203	+2,133	19,639	+147

Q: Isn't this a Chinese virus? If we keep the Chinese out, won't that protect us?

A: Absolutely not. This virus does not discriminate against different people; it has no "nationality"; it attacks all humans. A map showing all the airline flights that brought new COVID 19 cases into Africa shows that the vast majority of them came from Europe and North America. Only a small handful came in from China. Furthermore, the vast majority of cases and deaths right now are in North America, South America and Europe. This is not a Chinese virus.

<https://initiativeforequality.org/wp-content/uploads/Graphic-AfroTracingTeam.png>

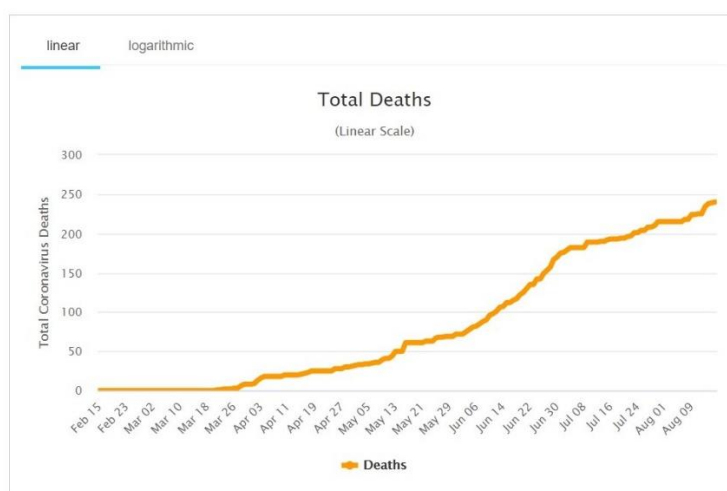
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Q: We don't have very many deaths from COVID-19 here in our country. People die of various diseases all the time, so we do not need to worry about a few deaths from COVID 19.

A: Here is where you can monitor the daily rate of COVID 19 cases and deaths in your country and others: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> The reason some countries have very few deaths at the moment is because the epidemic is only starting to grow there. This is the same way the pandemic started in other countries as well. Each week, it grows a little more. See the graph below showing the number of deaths in DR Congo, for example. This is how the curve looked in most other countries at the beginning. There is nothing unique about any country that will prevent the virus from spreading there.

DRC cumulative number of deaths as of 16 August 2020

Total Coronavirus Deaths in the DR Congo



Q: I have heard that some countries never had many deaths; for example, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. Maybe we will be like those countries.

A: That would be wonderful! Many countries can have low number of cases if they take all the precautions right away. It is the implementation of precautions that determines whether the numbers will continue growing or will go down.

Q: What are the precautions that would protect us?

A: Several things are necessary:

1. Wear a mask at all times when outside the home. Studies have shown that in countries where nearly everyone wears a mask properly, the virus can be brought under control.
2. Practice distancing. Stay at least two meters away from other people except for those you live with every day. Stay home unless it is necessary to leave. Avoid public toilets if possible. Do not gather at indoor sites such as bars, restaurants or parties. If you must meet up with someone, try to do it outdoors. Studies have shown that indoor gatherings

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or work spaces are the main way the virus spreads. If you are sick, you must stay in strict isolation to avoid infecting others.

3. If you work close to other people, you must wear a mask at all times. You and your employer must find a way to construct barriers between individuals (such as sheets of clear plastic) and to increase the fresh air ventilation (open the doors and windows, while running fans to circulate the air).
4. For now, travel must be avoided. Travelers coming to DRC brought the virus in, and travelers going from one city or village or province to another spread the virus around. Planes, trains, buses and taxis are dangerous because people cannot practice distancing, and remain too close to one another for many minutes or hours.
5. The government must take all measures needed to protect people, including insuring access to health care for everyone, constructing water points so that people can wash their hands frequently, supporting those who cannot go to work because it is unsafe, and keeping the food supply chains functioning. The countries that managed to control the virus are those that took care of their people.
6. Testing and contact tracing is essential, so that any outbreak or cluster can be found and prevented from spreading. This requires government support and citizen participation.

Q: What about hand washing? Isn't that the most important thing to do?

A: At first, medical researchers advised that this was an important strategy to avoid transmitting the virus. But research over the past few months has discovered that almost all transmission is by the air, and transmission by touching surfaces only plays a minor role. It is a good idea to wash your hands when possible, but it is no longer the focus of the prevention strategy. We now understand that wearing masks and practicing distancing (including isolation and quarantines) are the most important measures to prevent spread of the virus.

Q: Should we spray indoor and outdoor surfaces and people with disinfectants such as chlorine-based solutions?

A: *Absolutely not.* Here is what WHO has to say about this: "Spraying or fumigation of outdoor spaces, such as streets or marketplaces, is also not recommended to kill the COVID-19 virus or other pathogens because disinfectant is inactivated by dirt and debris and it is not feasible to manually clean and remove all organic matter from such spaces. Moreover, spraying porous surfaces, such as sidewalks and unpaved walkways, would be even less effective. Even in the absence of organic matter, chemical spraying is unlikely to adequately cover all surfaces for the duration of the required contact time needed to inactivate pathogens. Furthermore, streets and sidewalks are not considered to be reservoirs of infection for COVID-19. In addition, spraying disinfectants, even outdoors, can be harmful for human health. Spraying individuals with disinfectants (such as in a tunnel, cabinet, or chamber) is not recommended under any circumstances. This could be physically and psychologically harmful and would not reduce an infected person's ability to spread the virus through droplets or contact. Moreover, spraying individuals with chlorine and other toxic chemicals could result in eye and skin irritation, bronchospasm due to inhalation, and gastrointestinal effects such as nausea and vomiting."

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/cleaning-and-disinfection-of-environmental-surfaces-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

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Q: Shouldn't we use the traditional medicines that are being promoted on WhatsApp and other social media? They worked for our ancestors, so they will work for us, right?

A: This coronavirus is new – humans have never had this virus before. Therefore, we need to use the new methods that have been developed, and not just rely on the old methods. This means we have to wear masks, wash our hands, and practice distancing until the pandemic is over.

Q: Coronavirus is a rich man's disease. When poor people die, no one does anything about it. But this disease strikes rich people, so they are passing emergency regulations to protect themselves. Why should we care?

A: Yes, it's true that there are many inequities in the way that health is protected and health care is provided. But in this case, the virus is striking everyone, especially the poor who are more vulnerable to death due to poverty, malnutrition and pollution. It's moving rapidly around the world and threatening to kill millions of people. It is now the leading cause of death in some countries, and poor populations in countries such as Brazil and the United States are being hardest hit. This is not a time to say "us versus them" – we must all work together to stop the spread of this pandemic!

Q: Poor people cannot stay home – they must go to work to find money for food every day. If they stay home, they may die of hunger!

A: Yes, this is true, which is why it is necessary to follow all the steps listed in the document called "IfE Pandemic Response", especially those that protect poor people. With support from the government and other community members, the health of poor people can be protected. In fact, poor people must be protected in order to prevent "community spread" – where the virus spreads through the air all over the city. If the authorities want everyone to stay home, they must find a way to provide food and water to everyone who cannot afford it. You cannot force people to stay home and starve.

Q: Masks are so uncomfortable! I can't get enough air when I wear one, and my face is too warm and sweaty.

A: It's true, masks are uncomfortable at first. But after a few days you will get used to it. One thing that may help is to find a softer or better-fitting mask. If the mask you have is very uncomfortable, try to find a better one. Any time you find the mask to be uncomfortable, just remember that dying from coronavirus is much worse: it's very painful because your lungs fill up with liquid and you really can't breathe. Be glad for the small discomfort of the mask. Be sure to pull it all the way up over your nose and mouth, and remember that you must wash it with soap and water every day.

Q: The price of food is going up due to the confinement, shutting down markets, and blocking agricultural products from being transported. Let's stop these dangerous regulations before people starve to death!

We agree that the disruption of food supply chains is one of the most dangerous aspects of the pandemic. That's why we are calling on governments to do four things:

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1. Allow food transport to continue in a well-regulated way.
2. Regulate and subsidize the price of food so it doesn't become too expensive.
3. If it becomes necessary to close markets in order to prevent the spread of the virus, the government must immediately establish alternative methods and points of distribution of foods immediately.
4. Local committees must identify all people who are too poor to eat if they lose their job, or cannot leave their home to obtain food, and provide them with food.

Q: I have heard that African people are being used as guinea pigs to test dangerous vaccines so that other countries can use them against COVID-19?

A: Vaccines are one of the best forms of health care because they can prevent a disease before it starts. Unfortunately, a global misinformation campaign concerning vaccines has been spreading, even faster than the virus. The information being spread is false and harmful. If people believe it and refuse to allow their families to be vaccinated, all the terrible diseases from the past century will return. The only way to develop a new vaccine which is safe is to test it. These tests need to take place all over the world, to see if different populations can safely take the vaccine and be protected from the virus. Although a French doctor talked in April about running a vaccine trial in DR Congo, no plan was developed and at this time there are no COVID-19 vaccines being tested in the DR Congo. Vaccine development and trials are taking place in China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, India, Europe, United Kingdom, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil and the United States, among others. Once the vaccines have been shown to be safe for those populations, it will be important to test them in other regions of the world to ensure they work for everyone. Vaccines are essential to protect the world from the growing coronavirus pandemic, just as they were for stopping the Ebola epidemic in the DRC.

Q: Why does it seem that the richer countries such as the United States and United Kingdom have had many more cases than poorer countries?

A: That was true at first, but it may be because those populations travel more internationally and thus caught the virus sooner, or perhaps because the richer countries have older populations which are more susceptible to the virus. Either way, we may expect the developing countries to have growing case numbers this year. Already, Brazil is experiencing a massive outbreak, with over 107 000 deaths, and Mexico is following with 56 000 deaths. For countries with fewer deaths, we must take advantage of this time to do everything possible to reduce the severity of the outbreak now, while we still can.

According to World Bank researchers, "To the extent that data quality is not at play, we should expect developing countries to catch up with and overtake high-income countries as the pandemic continues to work its way through the age distributions of the developing world. COVID-19 has been described as a heat-seeking missile speeding toward the most vulnerable in society. That metaphor applies not just to the vulnerable in the rich world; the vulnerable in the rest of the world are not more immune. They may actually be easier targets." (Schellekens and Sourrouille. May 2020. Tracking COVID-19 as Cause of Death: Global Estimates of Relative Severity. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Tracking_COVID-19_as_-_Cause_of_Death-Global_Estimates_of_Severity.pdf)