

# COVID-19: HOW YOU CAN HELP THOSE WHO ARE AT HIGH RISK

We have now entered a period whereby the prevalence of COVID – 19, and loss of life as a result of the virus, is growing at a rapid rate. People with co-morbidities such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, chronic lung disease, high blood pressure hypertension, and obesity are at increased rate of suffering complications from COVID-19.

Although we all must abide by these safety precautions, people who have these co-morbidities have an especially greater responsibility to take extra care, and ensure that they adhere to their treatment schedule as prescribed by health professionals.

Taking your medication accordingly will give your body the strength and ability that it needs to fight opportunistic diseases such as COVID – 19, which weakens the immune system.



## OLDER PEOPLE AND COVID - 19

Elderly citizens are often dependent on support from younger family members and relatives to maintain their daily routines, and eat nutritious, balanced meals.

While maintaining social distancing is important, this does not mean we should lose contact with the elderly, or leave them unattended at this time.

Remember, during the period of isolation and quarantine, older people need safe access to basic supplies such

as nutritious food, money, and medicine to support their physical health, and social care.

While interacting too closely with elderly people is discouraged because it may expose them to transmission of the virus, it is very important to check up on them, and talk to them regularly so that their needs are attended to, and they do not feel alone.

It is important to share correct and accurate information in order to ensure that older people have clear messages and resources on how to cope during the pandemic and what to do if they should fall ill.

## SYMPTOMS OF COVID - 19

The symptoms for COVID – 19 include fever, cough, and tightness of the chest or shortness of breath. People who contract COVID-19 may take from 1 to 14 days to develop these symptoms.

## WHO QUALIFIES TO UNDERGO A COVID-19 TEST?

Testing for COVID - 19 is made available to patients who have been screened or assessed by a healthcare professional and found to qualify to undergo a

COVID-19 test. These are patients who have the above-mentioned symptoms.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOU HAVE COVID -19?

If you believe you need to undergo a test, you may contact the following numbers:

**National Institute for Communicable Diseases 24 hr hotline: 0800 029 999**

**KZN Provincial Hotline: 033 846 6000**

**WhatsApp number: 060 012 3456**

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# CLOSING THE TAP OF COVID-19

Cliché but true, as they say, 'the virus does not move, we move it'. In acknowledging this, we can recognise how each and every one of us has a role to play in perpetuating or slowing down the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The spread of the Covid-19 virus has now taken hold in KwaZulu-Natal, and we have now entered the stage where infections are surging, increasing exponentially, towards the expected peak. As this happens, we shall see more people who are sick and in need of hospital beds, and in the coming weeks, our health system will become strained and likely struggle to cope with the pressure imposed by the burden of Covid-19 cases. .



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There is a risk that people may struggle to find beds in hospitals in the coming weeks, as we have seen in other provinces, and we must ease the pressure on the health system. In order to relieve the pressure on the health system, we need to slow down the rate of new infections, by using the metaphor of 'closing the tap'. Imagine entering a room, and you find water on the floor, and the tap is still running. What would be the first thing you do – mop the floor or close the tap? Similarly, if our health system is flooded with cases of Covid-19, like water on the floor, it makes more sense to not only 'mop the floor' by giving patients bed, but primarily to 'close the tap' by reducing the number of new infections. For us to slow down the infection, we need to follow the precautions that are recommended by the Department of Health. In order to follow these precautions, we must first understand how the virus is transmitted.

*What type of health worker are you?  
Are you a floor mopper? or a tap turner off?*

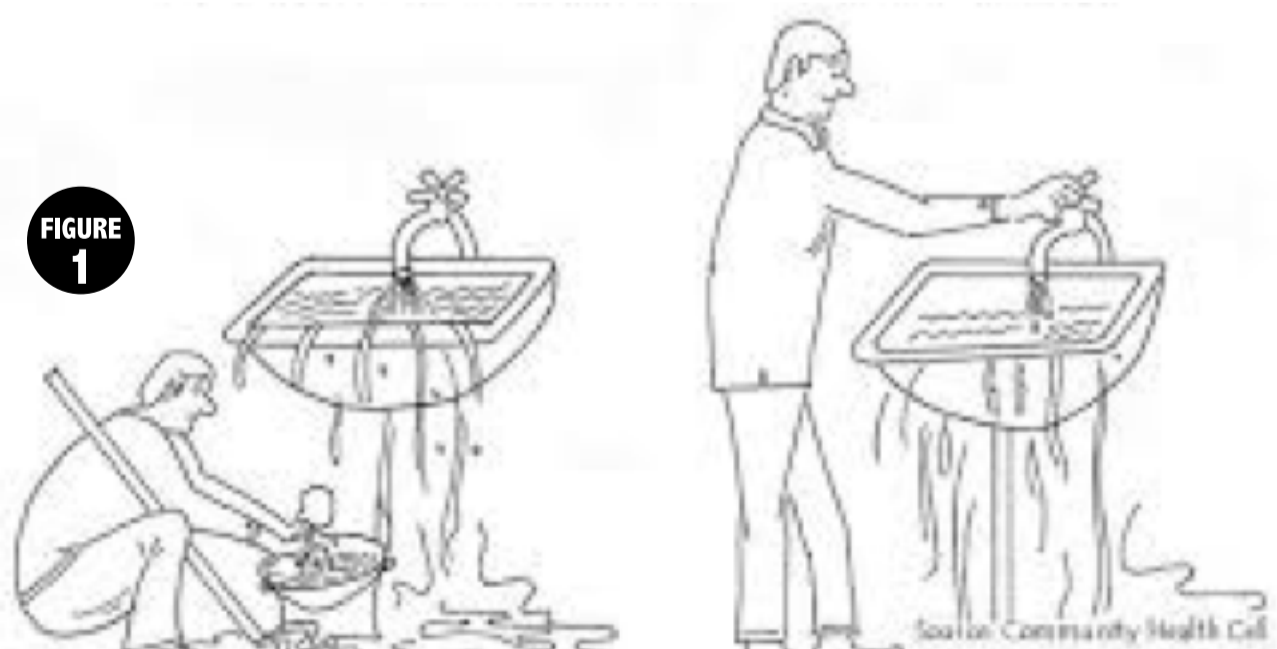


Figure 1: A public health approach to preventing new infections (Ravi Narayan, 2019)

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# WHAT YOU AND I NEED TO DO

As shown in Figure 2 below, the coronavirus is spread through droplets, often when a person shedding the virus is coughing, sneezing, spitting, talking or exhaling. These droplets can be loosely classified into three types, 1) heavy droplets that fall

within one metre, 2) medium droplets that fall onto surfaces within two metres, and 3) small tiny floating droplets known as droplet nuclei. These tiny droplets can float in the air, especially in poorly ventilated rooms where viral shedding is

high, such as ICU's for Covid-19 confirmed cases or rooms occupied by people with Covid-19, and have led to suspicions that the virus could be airborne, but the virus itself cannot thrive outside of these droplets. The virus is therefore

not necessarily airborne in and of itself, but these droplet nuclei are a cause for concern in high transmission areas, and make infection control very important, especially in efforts to protect people who are not infected with the virus.

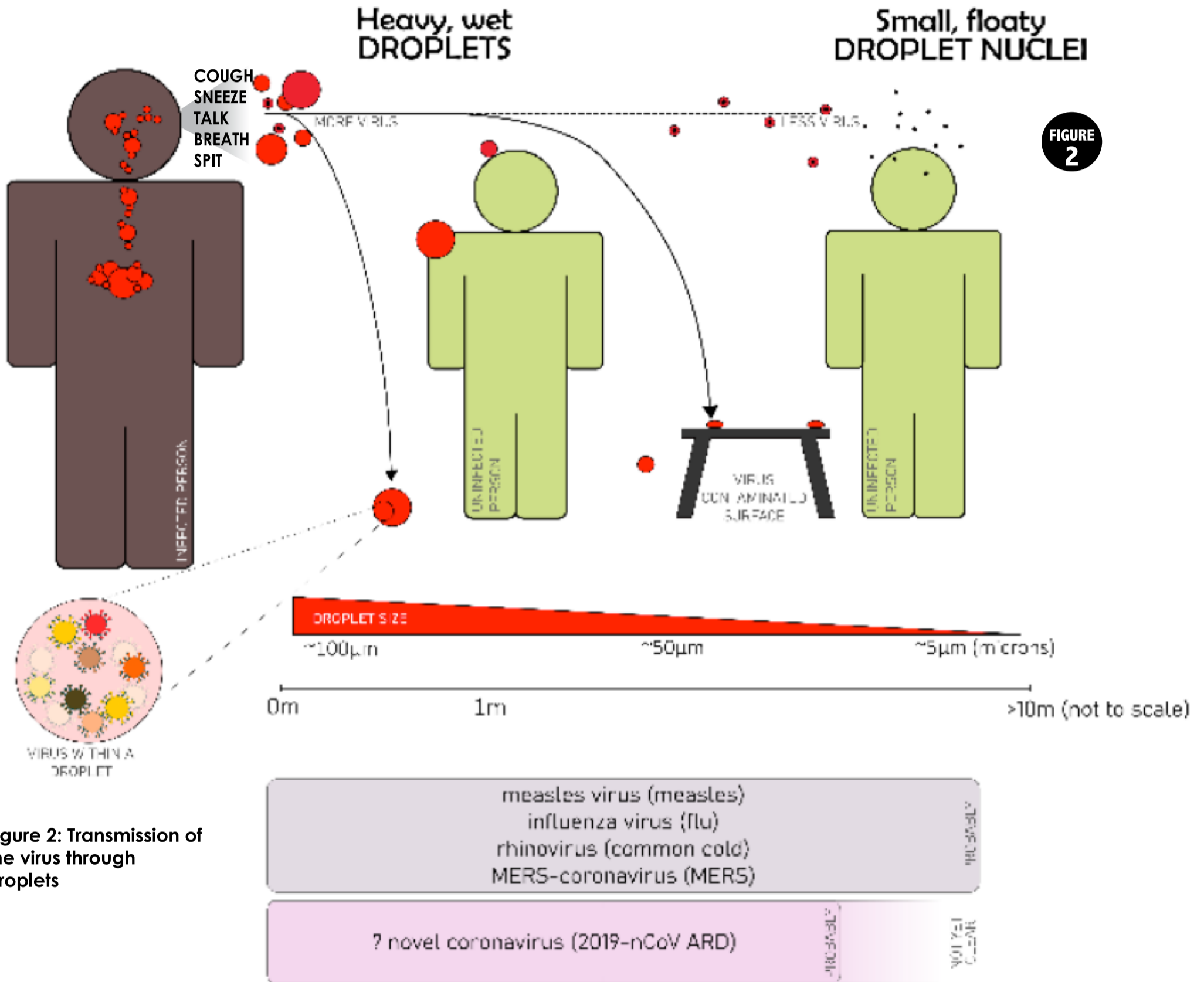


Figure 2: Transmission of the virus through droplets

We pick up the droplets containing the virus, and we transport them from one person to another, one equipment to another, one surface to another, one room to another and one place to another – we even transport these droplets home to our families, or from

home to our work. We must commit to breaking the chain of transmission, prevent the spread of the virus by getting a handle on our environment, remain vigilant at all times to the ways in which the virus could be transported, and disrupt this chain all the time. We need to clean surfaces regularly, and ensure adequate

ventilation of rooms, in addition to wearing masks, washing hands and ensuring a distance of 1,5m to 2m or more when engaging with others. The thing is, you can do the right thing most of the time, but the one time you miss a step, transmission or infection can occur. Therefore, consistency is fundamental when it comes to

infectious diseases, and breaking the chain of transmission. This requires behaviour change on our part, and for many of us, but we must unlearn and break our old habits, to make room for new ways of doing things, and accept that this is the new world order that we are going to live with going forward.

# COVID-19 RISK OF INFECTION

There are generally two risks that we talk about in relation to COVID-19, the Risk of Getting Infected and the Risk of Having a Bad Outcome Once Infected.

## The Risk Of Getting Infected

Here we talk about the chances of someone being exposed and then getting infected. This risk may vary depending on whether in the places where you live, work, go to school, there are people infected and the more there are people infected the more likely you would be exposed.

This risk is usually combined with how well infection prevention and control measures are adhered to e.g. physical distancing, hand hygiene practices, wearing of masks etc. Evidence that we have indicates that we are all at risk of getting infected if exposed. However, we all differ widely in the severity of disease that our bodies develop, from no symptoms at all to severe diseases.

## The Risk Of A Bad Outcome

Everyone is at risk of getting infected if exposed but the disease that our bodies manifest varies widely. Some people are inherently at higher risk of developing more severe symptoms and need intensive hospital care, ventilation and might die from the disease. Evidence that has been accumulated both locally and internationally has shown the following category of individuals to be at risk for bad COVID-19 disease outcomes.

### These are people who:

- **are over 60 years of age**
- **have diabetes**
- **have hypertension**
- **are obese**
- **have TB**
- **are living with HIV, and are on treatment**

It's important to note that the understanding around COVID-19 is still evolving and that what we know now might change with time and the list of people at risk might change. As the disease has no cure or vaccine and we rely heavily on our own immune system to fight the virus, It remains important to ensure that we support our immune system through eating a balanced diet as much as we can, get enough rest, reduce stress levels. All these little interventions help boost our immune system.

# “IT’S IN OUR HANDS” TO TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST COVID-19

The public campaign called “It’s in our Hands” is targeting community members to own the fight against COVID-19. The campaign is aimed at galvanising community members to join the fight against coronavirus through consuming health and hygiene messages as well as practising precautionary measures.

The campaign calls on people to understand that

## IT’S IN OUR HANDS TO:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle in our households and communities
- Adhere to the Lockdown Protocols and
- Slow the rate of infection by staying at home unless there is a good and valid reason to leave.
- Promote the Wearing of Masks
- Promote Washing of Hands
- Discourage Stigmatisation of people who test positive for COVID-19
- Provide the much needed help and support to those who are vulnerable
- Work hand in hand with healthcare workers and be understanding
- Promote good behaviour and avoid consumption of alcohol

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# WEARING A MASK EFFECTIVELY

Before you wear your mask ensure you're grabbing a clean one. Avoid re-wearing a mask as it could expose you to infection.

Put on your mask, holding it by the ear loops. Make sure your nose, mouth and chin are always covered. However tempting it may be to remove your mask for a moment, avoid doing so as that could expose your fingers and face to the very virus you're trying to shield yourself from.



Masks are effective only if you wear them properly

## Examples of Ineffective ways of wearing a mask



### Beware of these familiar mask mistakes:

- 1.** It's too loose. If your mask has openings around your nose, mouth and the sides of your face, it can't successfully shield you from infections that can sneak past those cracks. Your mask should fit cosily against your face.
- 2.** You forget your nose. Your nose needs to remain inside your mask — the infection is respiratory and goes through the air, and you could inhale it in.

### How to Remove Your Mask

- When you're no longer in a public space, remove your mask by the ear loops only.
- Don't touch the front of your mask- it could be contaminated.
- Make sure you hold the mask away from your face as you take it out.

### Store your mask immediately after use

- If you're not immediately going to wash your mask after you use it, place it in a sealable plastic packet.

**Don't forget to wash your hands** after removing the mask. Wash your hands while you're wearing it, as well.

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# NATURAL WAYS OF FIGHTING OFF THE COLD FLU SEASON



The winter season is in full swing, we are now experiencing cold mornings and even colder evenings with temperatures plummeting to 7°C in the evenings. With that drop in temperatures, we need to keep warm and find ways to boost our immune systems so that our bodies will be able to fight against bacteria and viruses. These bacteria can cause infections such as the common cold, flu or even pneumonia.

These infections are not necessarily caused by colder temperatures, but colder temperatures may play a role in reducing our body's immune response, making it harder for the body to fight off the bacteria and viruses that enter the body.

There are plenty of things that you can do to boost your

immune system, ranging from taking supplements, effervescent tablets or taking a more natural route of eating healthier foods and exercising. Here are some tips on how you can naturally boost your immune system:

## Eating healthier

The old saying "an apple a day, keeps the doctor away"

has some truth behind it. Eating foods that are nourishing and rich in certain vitamins can play a role in your body's immune system fighting off illnesses. One of the biggest immune system boosters that is known by many is Vitamin C. It is found in citrus fruits, such as oranges, naartjies, lemons and grapefruit. There are other foods that trigger immunity and battle infections, such as garlic, yoghurt, ginger and spinach.

## Sleep

As simple as this one sounds, adequate sleep is vital for the human body to function properly. By not getting enough sleep, it might weaken your immune system and make it vulnerable to illnesses. Adults need a minimum of seven hours of sleep every night for improved

health and well-being. Prolonged poor sleeping habits could lead to short and long-term health issues, such as mood swings, insomnia, diabetes and heart diseases.

## Exercising

Exercising is one of the foundations of living a healthy lifestyle. It has countless benefits, including controlling weight, improving heart health, managing blood sugar levels and protecting against a variety of diseases. Much like a healthy diet, exercise plays a role in maintaining a healthy immune system.

The practice of general hygiene such as washing hands, food and utensils properly is also vital in stopping the transferring of bacteria from one place to the next.

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# A HEALTHY WORKPLACE IS KEY TO ENSURING PRODUCTIVITY AMONG EMPLOYEES

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the average person spends a third of their adult life in the workplace. It is therefore important that the workplace is a place where employees can function at their best. Corporate Wellness Week, which falls on 6-10 July 2020, is an important week to reflect on ones' health in the workplace, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WHO proposes the following: "A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers work together to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace."

Considering today's fast-paced society, employees experience stress in the workplace on a daily basis, leading to a loss of concentration and even to injuries on duty. Work stress together with other mental health conditions, such as depression, impact on the productivity of employees and in turn also on the performance of companies and organisations. It is therefore important that employers pay increased attention to their employees' wellness, especially with regards to mental health and the COVID-19.

As national Lockdown regulations are being gradually relaxed, most employees in companies have gone back to work, and are faced with a challenge of safety from the COVID-19. It is thus paramount that employers provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to their employees during this outbreak. Many employees might, if not infected with COVID-19, suffer from anxiety and fear of being at work while there is an ongoing increasing spread of the virus.

The Department's Employee Wellness Unit offers counselling and other advisory services to employees needing assistance. The component also offers health check-ups regularly and hosts other activities such as aerobics or talks dealing with several employee issues from debt counselling to weight loss.



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# THE POWER OF UNIFIED ACTIONS

Next week on 18th of July is Mandela Day where people are encouraged to give of themselves in any way to help someone else in honour of former President Nelson Mandela, and his passion for uplifting people. South Africans however use the entire month of July (otherwise known as Mandela Month) to celebrate President Mandela's birthday so there could be ample opportunity for people to contribute their time towards uplifting other people.

What will you be doing for your fellow man? The betterment of society is in your hands.

Similarly to how President Mandela united people from across races to form the "rainbow nation", the pandemic has seen people from different walks of life form a formidable force against the virus. Recently the United States donated a 100 ventilators

to South Africa. The private sector has also partnered with the Department of Health to save lives; offering building space, masks, mobile clinics, food parcels and more.

Although the virus has posed a challenge in many ways, we have also been reminded about the power of the human spirit to persevere and overcome together.

2020



#MANDELA DAY

TAKE ACTION  
INSPIRE CHANGE

MAKE EVERY DAY  
A MANDELA DAY

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# HOW TO START YOUR OWN GARDEN

The impact of incorporating vegetables into your diet was touched on in last week's edition of the Health Chat Bulletin. Since finances may be strained in some families, starting a home garden is a perfect solution. Many of our health facilities have their own gardens to promote health and feed our patients. Gardening can also be mentally healthy as it is a relaxing and rewarding experience and has thus been incorporated by some of our Youth and Adolescent Friendly teams as an extra-curricular activity for young people after school.



If you're new to gardening, it's better to begin with vegetables that are easy to plant and easy to care for. Vegetables can be planted in two ways. You can either sow seeds directly in the ground, or you can purchase plant seedlings.

## Planting Seeds

Plant big seeds, such as those of pumpkins, cucumbers and sweet melons, far from one another (two handwidths) since these plants are "runners" and need lots of space. Make a separate hole for each seed, planting each one five times deeper than their size and at an equal soil depth.

Plant smaller seeds, such as those of beetroot, spinach,

maize and beans, closer to one another. Make a furrow in the soil and sow the seeds in the furrow. Scatter very small seeds, such as those of carrots and lettuce, evenly over very fine soil. Cover it with a thin layer of soil. After sowing the seed, water the soil immediately with a watering-can. Keep the soil moist until the shoots appear.

## Planting Seedlings

Water the plants well before transplanting them. If possible, choose a cloudy, cool day. On warm, sunny days seedlings should be transplanted late in the afternoon so that they can recover overnight.

Make a hole in the soil deep

enough so that the plant roots fit easily into it. Plant the seedling, being careful to not damage the delicate roots. Press the soil firmly but carefully down around the plant and cover the soil with mulch such as straw, grass or leaves to keep it moist. Do not cover the plants.

For additional information on how to take care of each vegetable in your garden, you should read books and watch videos since each vegetable has its own unique needs and may need more than just watering to thrive. You may also choose to have an indoor garden which sometimes requires a different maintenance plan for your vegetables as well.



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