



Staying safe during the festive Christmas season in the time of Covid 19

It is almost a year since the world learnt of Covid 19 and it is still not exactly clear where or when the Covid 19 index case/“patient zero” presented and this could largely be due to the virus’ long incubation period. The world has become a very different place since the discovery of this new coronavirus.

While many infected individuals present with symptoms such as a cough, fever, loss of taste and smell, and other symptoms, some remain asymptomatic and can unknowingly infect others as they go about their daily lives fuelling the pandemic. These individuals are referred to as “silent spreaders” and can present in three ways:

1. asymptomatic (infected but does not develop symptoms),
2. presymptomatic (infected but does not have symptoms yet but they develop later) and
3. mildly symptomatic (have developed some symptoms with no evidence of pneumonia).

Early research indicates that people with COVID-19 may transmit the virus to two or three people before symptoms appear and the festive Christmas season presents a justifiable worry for worsening prevalence, as we experience a second wave of infections. Medically, this phenomenon is known as the second wave and is characterised by isolated cluster outbreaks and regional increase in infections and hospitalisations following an initial decrease of new cases. In South Africa, poor and crowded urban areas have become a hotspot for the disease with the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape showing a noted increase in new cases on a daily basis.

Covid 19 Hotspots

Certain high risk activities and failure to adhere to precautions such as physical distancing, hand-washing/sanitisation, mask-wearing have been identified as the major factors in the spike of new cases. Public health experts are noting that new cases can be traced and linked to “super spreader” events such as funerals, weddings, and indoor parties.

A hotspot district will have:

- At least 2 new infections per day on average for the past 7 days, and
- At least 50 cumulative cases, and
 - Either 5% compound growth rate (CGR) over the past 7 days (doubling time of two weeks or less)
 - Or at least 30 new cases per 100,000 Discovery lives over the past 7 days (high attack rate). Source COVID-19 hotspots: Discovery real-time data

The president recently announced tighter lockdown regulations for the Nelson Mandela Bay metro as the numbers of cases are climbing.

Why is it important to slow down the spread of this virus?

The virus has interrupted our lives in many ways previously unimaginable and will continue to do so in the near future. A number of countries have initiated vaccine trials in the hope of finding a vaccine that will safely and effectively inoculate individuals against COVID-19. South Africa and Brazil are part of the Oxford COVID-19 trial (ChAdOx1 nCoV19) which is being tested in multiple countries. But there is still no cure or vaccine for the virus that causes SARS-CoV-2 making social distancing and other preventive measures important in curbing the spread of this virus.

What can I do to protect myself and others from Covid 19?

1. Wear a face mask/nose covering in public or when in the company of people who do not live with you,
2. Adhere to social distancing guidelines – keep at least 1.5 meters apart,
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands,
4. Wash your hands regularly using soap and water or use a 70% alcohol based sanitiser,
5. Practice good personal hygiene e.g. cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
6. Practice good environmental hygiene – keep rooms well ventilated and keep surfaces clean

7. Avoid closed environments, crowded places, and close-contact settings if possible and
8. If you have a fever, cough and or other symptoms or if you think you may have been exposed to COVID-19 self-isolate and seek medical attention

What can the church do?

1. Keep attendance of church services to a maximum 100 people in a well ventilated building,
2. Keep attendance of church services to a maximum 250 people in an open air venue,
3. Adhering to the COVID-19 protocols such as screening of all the congregants, social distancing and etc,
4. And most importantly educate and support communities about this contagion – how to prevent/curb its spread and connect them to medical and psychosocial services

Resources

1. <https://america.cgtn.com/2020/03/30/who-is-patient-zero-of-covid-19-pandemic-heres-what-we-know>
2. <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200402-sitrep-73-covid-19.pdf>
3. <https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/in-patients-of-covid-19-what-are-the-symptoms-and-clinical-features-of-mild-and-moderate-case/>
4. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/sas-covid-19-hotspots-show-increase-in-infections-spurring-concerns-over-second-wave-a0a9fe50-a17f-4072-b5d4-0c6088f007a2>
5. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/first-and-second-waves-of-coronavirus>
6. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/13/831883560/can-a-coronavirus-patient-who-isnt-showing-symptoms-infect-others>
7. <https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/covid19-stay-informed-stay-healthy>
8. <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>