

Novel coronavirus disease: prevention is better than cure

PROF DR RAFI UDDIN AHMAD

Barely one-fifth of the ongoing century has passed, but the scenario is already projecting a gloomy forecast of the future. The list of viruses humankind has come across in the recent past is getting longer, starting with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) to Dengue, Nipah, Zika, Ebola, Chikungunya, etc. and eventually leading all the way to today's coronavirus.

For the last few weeks, people are coming across words like 'home quarantine', 'institutional quarantine', 'self-quarantine', 'isolation' and so on with a good number of them possibly not understanding any of them adequately.

'Home quarantine' refers to solitary confinement inside a room where access should be denied to anyone for 14 days at a stretch. During this period, food and other essentials to the person in quarantine have to be supplied keeping an optimum distance. Ensuring this on one's own accord would be defined as 'self-quarantine'.

'Institutional quarantine' means the exact thing under close institutional supervision in speculated health facilities like hospitals. Meanwhile, the term 'isolation' or 'medical isolation' points towards similar

close institutional supervision of a person certifiably diagnosed with the disease and is under treatment.

In addition, 'contact tracing' is defined as the process of finding out all persons who might have come in contact with the patient diagnosed. The person/s identified to be fitting the aforementioned description considered in contact tracing has/ have to be taken in quarantine (home or institutional) immediately even if found asymptomatic.

Reliable, affordable and globally available vaccines might take considerable time to be widely available. Unless people themselves are sufficiently cautious, they are pretty much likely to get caught off guard. It is high time that everyone put cent per cent of their effort on preventing rather than repenting later.

Everyone should realise the true intention behind the nationwide closure and stay home unless absolute urgency pops up. Absolute urgency means urgent medical attention or the dire necessity to replenish the urgent daily essentials. It does not include invitations or any sort of urge to join political, social, cultural or religious gatherings. Going out would best be featuring a mask (better be N95 respirator) in addition to



a relentless quest to avoid any public gatherings at any cost.

Given the current situation, everyone can use the good habit of washing hands with water and soap. But washing hands has to be frequent and lengthened (at least 20 seconds) by all means. Meanwhile, using tissue papers or handkerchiefs, or at least the face of the elbow while sneezing or coughing is encouraged. Besides, it is also high time that everybody shunned the bad habit of nail-biting, counting cash or turning book pages and any such habit that includes putting fingers in mouth, nose or eyes.

This airborne virus can spread via coughs, sneezes, mucus, saliva etc. of the affected person and nobody knows who might get affected. The virus can enter via nostrils, oral cavity and eye corners with sneeze droplets and reach its destination in the human respiratory tract to replicate. So, 'social distancing' has to be ensured through keeping the least inter-person distance at 1 metre or 3 feet always.

Furthermore, greetings with handshakes, hugs or embraces and anything else featuring physical touches should be avoided. It is better to heat items

coming in the proximity of a patient or the ones coming home from outside (including dresses, belongings, groceries etc.) at 60° C temperature or boil them in water of equal temperature.

Love of eating raw or half-boiled foods (eggs, grilled, barbecued or smoked meat or fish, especially of 'bushmeat') has to be abandoned at any cost. To boost up the natural immunity, everyone should eat seasonal fruits, especially the citrus ones and fresh green leafy vegetables.

In the end, it can be said that it is time to rephrase what Greek sophist Socrates once said "know thyself" into "save thyself". Just like questing for knowledge about self is the best knowledge, similarly, questing for saving self is the best possible defense right now given the current circumstance.

Since there is no effective antiviral drug to cure it as of now, would it not be better to prevent the disease with awareness and precautions than trying to cure it after getting infected as a result of carelessness with a heightened risk of things going out of hand for the individual, for the society as well as for the country?

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NEW PRODUCT

Biodegradable stents for ERCP: dream or reality?

Biodegradable stents have been a longstanding dream for endoscopy in general, and for endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) in particular. They could be used to treat a variety of benign and malignant conditions and could potentially save patients from repeat procedures that are performed solely for stent removal. In a recent study, researchers prospectively evaluated degradation time, technical features, and safety of novel, helically shaped, biodegradable pancreatic and biliary stents.

The stents, of various sizes, were designed to degrade at different rates: slow (11 weeks), medium (20 days), and fast (12 days). Thirty-eight patients underwent placement of 53 biodegradable stents (34 biliary and 19 pancreatic). Stents were evaluated at different predetermined time points depending on their degradation rate.

At the first time point, across stent types, 48 stents (91%) had partially degraded and 5 stents migrated early. At the second time point, 100% of stents had fully degraded. Fluoroscopic visualisation was subjectively rated as good or excellent for 94% of stents.

At 6-month follow-up, no patients had required readmission or additional treatments for symptom recurrence or adverse events. One patient developed post-ERCP pancreatitis.

In this small but prospective study, biodegradable stents appear to have at least minimally acceptable safety and efficacy. The authors mention the possibility that these devices could have pharmaceutical agents incorporated into them, potentially making them both drug-eluting and biodegradable.

HEALTH bulletin



Infant sleep problems linked to later emotional disorders in children

Sleep problems, common in infancy, have been associated with emotional and behavioural issues in early childhood. However, it is unknown whether such mental health risk persists into middle childhood. To study this, researchers used data from a longitudinal study of 1,460 first-time mother–infant pairs. Infants were clustered into three profiles: persistent/severe sleep problems (19.4%), moderate/fluctuating sleep problems (56.0%), or settled (24.7%).

Infants in the moderate/fluctuating sleep problem group also had elevated risk for separation anxiety compared with the settled group.

Infant sleep problems can unsettle the whole family. Parents often develop suboptimal habits (e.g., cosleeping, lying in bed with child, use of media to soothe) to manage a poor sleeper, and this might lead to a child not being able to cope emotionally without the parent's presence.

COVID-19

Panic buying is happening due to online peer pressure

STAR HEALTH DESK

Public health emergencies have been demonstrated to have an impact on the behavioural health of the affected population. The novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) disease, which originated in China at the end of 2019, has gained intense attention nationwide and globally. Star Health recently interviewed Shamim Ahmed, who is a doctoral researcher on social and behavioural health sciences at the University of Toronto, Canada. His expertise is to evaluate human psychology based on social determinants of health. He has been closely observing the socio-cultural aspects of coronavirus and its possible impact on human behaviour.

Star Health: What do you think are the major concerns regarding the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh?

Shamim Ahmed: This is first time in many years that most of the people in the world are on the same boat because of this deadly virus. You must have seen that the mortality rate of this disease is still pacing slow, which is less than 4%. However, as the affected population is not confined in a particular area and the disease is already declared to be a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the total number of deaths at the end of this devastating phase might be enormous. However, whatever the mortality rate is, this disease has particular impact on some

behavioural aspects of human psychology and that differs in different societies based on their cultural and social values.

Star Health: Can you give us an example of the effect of this pandemic in behavioural aspects?

Shamim Ahmed: For example, consider the "panic buying" situation worldwide. People have become concerned about their future and possible lockdown situation; therefore, they have started stockpiling necessary goods.

If you look at the market of USA, UK or Canada, you will see people are buying toilet papers, tissues and canned foods at large numbers, whereas, people in south-east Asia are buying rice, oil, lentils, potatoes, biscuits, puffed rice etc. Nevertheless, some people in Bangladesh are also buying toilet papers, although that is not relevant in our context.

However, because of the global connectivity among citizens through social media, this is happening as an outcome of 'online peer pressure'. This is called as 'irrational panic buying' in social theories of health.

Star Health: What are the issues that should be of concern in the coming days?

Shamim Ahmed: There is no effective treatment available for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as of today. We know some human trials of vaccine has just been started, but to make it available for all, is a long journey and we just cannot wait for that. Therefore, currently the

key major intervention to prevent COVID-19 is to ensure social isolation and maintaining hygienic behaviour.

I think people may be fairly aware of handwashing practices due to the various social and behaviour change interventions of the government and non-government organisations, but 'social isolation' in Bangladeshi culture is extremely difficult. My anticipation is that at a certain stage, lockdown measure may just be necessary; and people might get frustrated and mentally unwell due to these changes in their lifestyles.

Star Health: What will be your suggestion in such a scenario?

Shamim Ahmed: It is absolutely necessary to develop affirmative messages for people to follow. Instead of saying "if you go out and mix with people, you will be punished", it should be said "going out and social mixing might put your child's life in danger. Stay home".

So, developing such positive messages require specific knowledge and expertise. Government and development partners need to ensure they appoint the right people who are experts of social and behavioural health, to develop campaigns and programmes that will be welcomed by people in Bangladesh's cultural context.

Star Health: Thank you for your time.

Shamim Ahmed: Thank you and stay safe.

Factors affecting suicide risk in people with alcohol use disorder

Although heightened risk for suicide has long been associated with alcohol use disorder (AUD), questions remain about the potentially confounding influences of psychiatric comorbidities and familial factors.

Overall, for individuals with AUD, suicide rates in women (3.5%) and men (3.9%) were 12 and 5 times higher than the rates in those without AUD; controlling for sociodemographic factors did not substantially alter the findings. Risks were highest during the first 5 years after initial AUD diagnosis (adjusted hazard ratios: women, 128; men, 28) and tapered afterward. Risks were highest among those with earliest ages of onset, steadily decreasing with later onset. However, among people without psychiatric comorbidities (28% of the AUD cohort), individuals with AUD had even higher suicide risks than people without AUD (HRs: women, 74; men, 21).

Among individuals with AUD, suicide risks were substantially elevated and nearly as high for women as for men, were high even for individuals without psychiatric comorbidities. These results suggest the need for heightened attention regarding the potential for suicide in patients with these features.

Weekly report on COVID-19 launched by NSU

The researchers from the Department of Public Health of North South University (NSU) have launched a weekly report that monitors COVID-19 cases in Bangladesh - an analytical document that is proving essentials for researchers and news reporters. This report is an initial scientific response to the fast moving pandemic in Bangladesh. The report can be downloaded from: <http://www.northsouth.edu/newassets/images/IT/Covid%20and%20Bangladesh.pdf>

  /StarHealthBD

HOW TO HOME QUARANTINE

The home quarantined person should:



Stay in a well-ventilated single-room preferably with an attached toilet



Needs to stay away from elderly people, pregnant women, children



Restrict his/her movement within the house



Under no circumstances attend any social/religious gathering



Wash hand frequently with soap and water or with alcohol-based sanitizer



Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding



Wear a surgical mask at all times. The mask should be changed every 6-8 hours

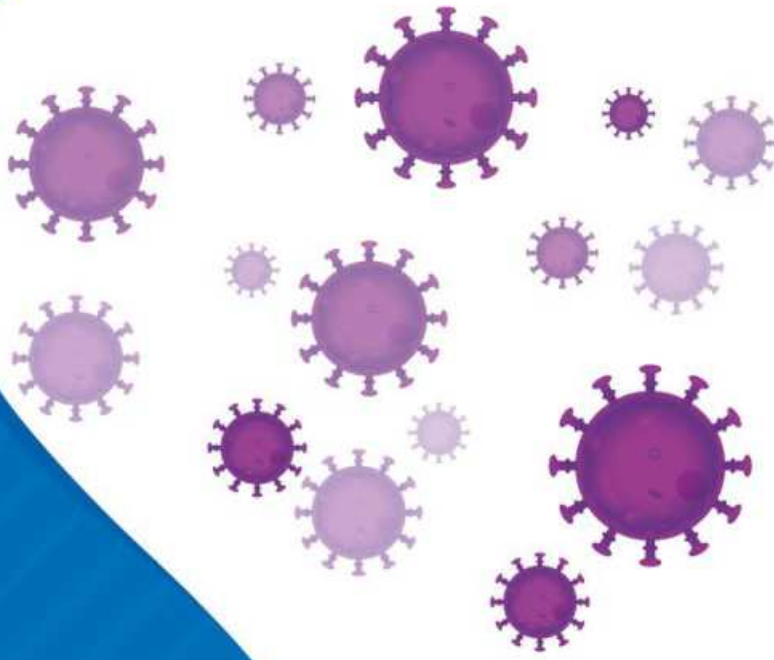


Dispose off used mask in a closed bin and bin should also be handled responsibly



If symptoms appear, he/she should immediately inform the nearest health centre

COVID-19 OUTBREAK



In Search of Excellence