

COVID-19 questions relating to consumers

STAR HEALTH DESK

Through illness, community and national lockdowns, and economic downturn, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned the lives upside down of billions of people globally. Here are answers to some questions about the COVID-19 pandemic related to consumers.

Can I get COVID-19 from food? There is currently no evidence that people can catch COVID-19 from food or food packaging. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and the transmission route is through person-to-person contact and through direct contact with respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Can the virus live on the surface of foods (including fruits and vegetables, frozen foods, pre-packaged foods)? Coronaviruses cannot multiply in food – they need a live animal or human host to multiply and survive.

How to wash fruits and vegetables? Washing fruit and vegetables with potable water is sufficient.

Can the virus live on the surface of food packaging? How long?



Is it necessary to disinfect? It is not necessary to disinfect food packaging materials, but hands should be properly washed after handling food packages and before eating.

How long is it to cook food? To what temperature to kill the virus? The virus is not more resistant to heat than the usual viruses and bacteria found in food. As recommended for good hygiene practice, foods should be thoroughly cooked to at least 70°C.

What precautions should consumers take in grocery stores?

Consumers should maintain a safe physical distance of at least one metre from all other shoppers and staff while queuing before entering the store and while shopping in the store. If a trolley or basket is used while shopping, sanitise the handle before and after use. Hands should be sanitised before entering the store. Practice good coughing/sneezing etiquette while in the store. Avoid touching mouth, nose or

eyes during shopping. Minimise direct hand contact with food by using available tongs and serving utensils. Use contactless payment rather than cash/notes (where feasible).

Is food/grocery delivery safe? Yes, if the provider follows good personal and food hygiene practices. After accepting food/grocery deliveries, hands should be washed with soap and water.

What is the best household disinfectant for surfaces? Regular household cleaning

and disinfection products will effectively eliminate the virus from household surfaces. For cleaning and disinfecting households with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 illnesses - surface virucidal disinfectants, such as 0.05% sodium hypochlorite (NaClO) and products based on ethanol (at least 70%), should be used.

Is it still safe to go to food markets? Animal markets? Wet markets?

It should be safe provided it is possible to maintain a safe physical distance of at least one metre from all other shoppers and staff, it is possible to wash/sanitise hands, and that Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Hygienic Practices (GMP/ GHP) standards are maintained in the market.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, some of the information may have changed since this article was last updated. Get the most up-to-date information from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organisation websites.

Source: World Health Organisation

PROTECTION

Boosting immunity to protect from COVID-19

PROF M KARIM KHAN

Self-defense is the best defense. To protect ourselves from any disease or infection we need to increase our immunity. How can we do that? It is relatively simple and inexpensive. What we need is our desire and a bit of modification of our lifestyle and food habit.

Adequate rest and sleep are important to increase our immunity. At least 6 to 8 hours of sleep at night is recommended for adults. It refreshes the body and mind and enhances immunity. Reduce stress by praying, exercise, meditation and yoga. Less stress will result in peace and will lead to more immunity.

Healthy foods are closely linked to increased immunity. A balanced diet is needed to keep the body and mind strong and healthy. Food consists of macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients mean carbohydrates, proteins, fats and water - adequate intake of these are important for growth and development. Micronutrients mean vitamins and minerals which are also essential for life. They cannot be synthesised in the body, thus to be taken with food. Less sugar and salt consumption always help us to remain healthy and fit.

We all know that there is no vaccine or specific medication for COVID-19 until now. It can only be prevented by maintaining proper health and hygiene practices like social distancing, frequent hand washing and wearing masks whenever required etc.

If someone is infected with COVID-19, the most important remedy is mental strength and one's immunity. With strong morale and good immunity, one may overcome the problem easily.

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HEALTH bulletin



Discharged COVID-19 patients without symptoms often have positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR tests

After observing that some COVID-19 patients who had recovered and had been discharged were readmitted with positive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, Chinese investigators retested 60 COVID-19 patients who had been discharged to in-home quarantine after hospitalisation. PCR testing status of these patients at hospital discharge was unknown.

Among the retested patients (median age, 47), none had symptoms of COVID-19, but 10 tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 between 4 and 24 days after discharge (6 had positive anal swab results, and 5 had positive nasopharyngeal swab results; 1 patient had positive results for both). One patient had donated plasma 9 days before testing positive. Outcomes for patients who received the plasma were not reported.

This study suggests that patients who previously were positive for SARS-CoV-2 by PCR and who were discharged after hospitalisation frequently have persistently positive PCR tests, yet the clinical significance and infectivity are minimal. These PCR tests likely are responding to noninfective RNA fragments and do not represent detection of viable virus. The fact that these patients reportedly were under strict home isolation argues more for persistence of RNA detection than for reinfection.

Is herd immunity on COVID-19 hard to achieve?

DR ZUBAIR KHALED HUQ

Herd immunity is a concept based on the body's immune resistance to the spread of a contagious disease within a population. It is achieved when a significantly high proportion of individuals are vaccinated against it and therefore develop immunity. When enough people are vaccinated, a virus is unable to spread through the population.

As no vaccines for coronavirus are yet in sight, experts caution that achieving natural herd immunity in majority of the population of Bangladesh might bring forward a health catastrophe considering the country's population density, healthcare facilities, and awareness regarding COVID-19 among its citizens.

Herd immunity can be acquired in two ways, either naturally or artificially. Achieving herd immunity naturally equals to a public health catastrophe where a huge number of people will get infected and some of them will die.

However, the reality is that there is no vaccine for the coronavirus as of yet. In the absence of a vaccine, immunity to the virus can likely only be achieved if an individual contracts it and survives, developing antibodies in their system. It would require the immune-compromised to be sacrificed for the sake of the economy, a notion which is unacceptable and inhumane.

The concept centres on enough people in the population, as many as 70 percent in the case of COVID-19

getting infected thereby building up their immunity to the virus. With an overwhelming majority having developed such immunity, the rest of the population would be much more secure and the infection would gradually fade away. For many viruses, including coronavirus, any immunity if there be, lasts a few months at best, especially given that the virus mutates. Unless and until it is shown that COVID-19 patients benefit from long term immunity, to consider herd immunity is but a fairytale.

The World Health Organisation said in a statement, "There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection." This means the concept of herd immunity is not guaranteed even if 70 percent of the population were to get infected. Besides, when 70 percent of a population gets infected, many will die when the

infection overpowers the antibodies. 70 percent of this population which requires to be infected for herd immunity, comes to a huge number. In other words, more than 120 million people will be required to get infected with COVID-19 before herd immunity kicks in. If a 1 percent mortality rate is applied, the number of people dead would be massive.

Medical experts agree that at some point we will all acquire herd immunity like we have done so with other diseases. But if a population races towards herd immunity before a vaccine is available, the cost in human lives can be catastrophic. This is why the aim is to suppress the spread of infection as much as possible so that the health facilities are not overwhelmed before a vaccine is made available.

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Vitamin C and COVID-19 infection

DR MUHAMMAD TOREQUL ISLAM

Vitamin C, also called ascorbic acid, is an essential micronutrient for humans. Deficiency of this vitamin results in impaired immunity and higher susceptibility to infections. It contributes to immune defense by supporting various cellular functions of both the innate and adaptive immune systems.

Supplementation with ascorbic acid appears to be able to both prevent and treat respiratory and systemic infections. Prophylactic prevention of infection requires dietary ascorbic acid intakes that provide at least adequate, if not saturating plasma levels (i.e., 100-200 mg/day), which optimise cell and tissue levels.

Vitamin C showed antiviral effects against influenza virus. In this regard, this vitamin may act against the influenza virus, coronavirus, or picornavirus. Ascorbic acid also has a beneficial effect in common cold, asthma and pneumonia. In a study, Citrus sinensis extract (rich in ascorbic acid) was found to inhibit the replication of coronavirus in infected cultured cells.

Ascorbic acid is the vastly taken vitamin by humans as it is found in various foods and sold as a dietary supplement. Due to its water solubility, dietary excesses not absorbed, and excesses in the blood rapidly excreted in the urine, so it exhibits remarkably low acute toxicity. But large doses of vitamin C may cause nausea, abdominal cramps and diarrhoea. Therefore, it is recommended to meet the nutrient requirement from natural food sources as much as possible and not overdose on it to avoid the unwanted effects.

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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 time. The mask should be changed every 8-8 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

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