

## COVID-19 Frequently asked questions

### *Staff and student general information, testing positive and Contact Tracing*

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#### **General information on COVID-19**

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#### **1. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who contracts COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

#### **2. What can I do to minimise the risk of infection?**

The virus is very susceptible to common anti-bacterial cleaning agents such as bleach, and alcohol-based cleaners (60% volume). Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Maintain at least 2 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.

#### **3. How long does the COVID-19 virus survive on surfaces?**

It is not certain how long the virus survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

*If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Surface sprays will be provided in your work areas for regular cleaning of surfaces.*

#### **4. I have flu symptoms should I get tested?**

The symptoms of COVID-19 include cough, sore throat, shortness of breath or fever. However, these are also symptoms of the flu. The National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) recommends that you should only get tested if you display symptoms plus you have:

- Been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 person;
- Travelled to a high-risk country;
- Worked in or been to a healthcare facility treating people with Covid-19;
- Have a severe case of pneumonia with an unknown cause.

*However, one should consult your medical practitioner immediately if you display symptoms.*

**5. Where should I go if I want to get tested for COVID-19?**

If you think you might have contracted the virus, you can call the NICD helpline (0800 029 999) and you will be advised on possible testing facilities. However, testing is not routinely done unless testing is indicated by a health professional therefore one would need to be assessed by a medical practitioner in order to qualify for testing.

**6. What happens if I test positive for COVID-19?**

Anyone who tests positive will immediately be notified and put into quarantine at home or at a facility designated to manage the outbreak. You will then remain in quarantine until repeat testing shows you no longer have the virus.

**7. If I test positive for COVID-19, what should I do next to protect people around me?**

Testing positive for COVID-19 with symptoms or after an exposure means that you have coronavirus and you may spread the virus to other people. You need to reduce the risk of spreading the virus by limiting your movements through self-isolation. There are a series of actions you will need to take for 14 days

- **If you have been on campus in the last 14 days, contact your line manager/supervisor or the Faculty Manager (Jessika.samuels@up.ac.za) so that the contact tracing of UP staff and students can be initiated.**
- Stay home except to get medical care
- Call ahead before visiting your health care providers
- Wear a face mask around people. If you are caring for people in your home, place a mask on them
- Separate yourself from the other people in your home (home isolation)
- Cover your coughs and sneezes; clean your hands often
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day.

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**Testing and protection of personal information**

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**1. Can the employer request specific information on the health status of an employee in the context of COVID-19?**

Yes, the employer is obliged to maintain a safe and hazard free working environment in terms of the Occupation Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, read together with the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998. If an employee’s health status may endanger other employees, the employer can request that employees be tested and disclose their results to the employer. The disclosed information should not be used to unfairly discriminate against such an employee.

**2. Can the employer force an employee to undergo testing for the COVID-19 virus?**

Yes, the employer can force an employee to undergo testing in order to maintain a safe working environment. If you are displaying symptoms or suspected to have COVID-19, you may be asked to be tested before you are allowed back on to campus.

**3. Can I refuse to give consent to be tested for COVID-19?**

No, the regulations require employees to undergo mandatory testing, in some instances, in order to manage the spread of COVID-19.

**4. Does a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 have a duty to disclose his or her status?**

Yes, a person who has tested positive has a duty to disclose his or status to enable the Government to take appropriate measures to combat the spread of COVID-19.

**5. Will my line manager be notified if I test positive?**

Your manager/supervisor may be informed of your COVID status in order to help identify possible contacts. Your manager/supervisor will need to know if you are not able to work, and/or when you are cleared to return to work. UP representatives (either from the faculty or campus health) will interview you in detail. At that point, a determination will be made about who else needs to be notified.

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**Contact tracing**

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**1. What is contact tracing and how is it done?**

Contact tracing is the identification of people who may have been in close contact with you or other people with positive tests. The purpose of contact tracing is for early identification of other people who may have COVID-19 infections so that they can be alerted and tested, and to prevent further spread of infection.

A Faculty of University of Pretoria representative will contact all employees and students who test positive for COVID-19. During your phone call with the representative, you will be asked to list your work contacts from 48 hours before your symptoms started, your work dates since that time, and your use of personal protective equipment at work. Travel and household contacts may also be assessed. As is typically done in infectious diseases contact tracing, your name may be shared with each contact during a phone interview conducted by the representative, to determine if they were exposed to you. Please know that we take the confidentiality of your status very seriously and your information will only be shared when absolutely necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

**2. Why do we need to do contact tracing?**

To stop the spread of COVID-19, it's important to keep track of people's movements. Contact tracing helps us do that.

**3. What criteria is used to define someone as a "significant" contact?**

A contact is defined as exposure to an employee who tests positive for COVID-19 for more than 10 minutes and within less than 1.5 meters. The Faculty/UP representative will contact you to find

out about the circumstances of your exposure, use of PPE and advise if you need follow-up monitoring and/or testing.

**4. Under what circumstances will the contacts get tested?**

Not all contact with someone who had a positive test is considered an exposure, and the current policy is to test only contacts that have COVID symptoms.

Information sources:

1. [www.gov.za/coronavirus/faq](http://www.gov.za/coronavirus/faq)
2. Guidance note on the processing of personal information in the management and containment of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of the protection of personal information Act4 of 2013 (POPIA). Information Regulator South Africa. April 2020.
3. <https://infectioncontrol.ucsfmedicalcenter.org>