



6 March 2020

Dear colleagues

I write to you less than 24 hours after the announcement of the first positive case of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in South Africa. As you may already know, a 38-year old man from KwaZulu-Natal presented with coronavirus symptoms shortly after his arrival from Italy on Sunday the 1st of March, via OR Tambo International Airport. He immediately self-isolated along with his consulting physician, and is currently being treated by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

While the spread of the virus continues to be a great concern, particularly for those of us operating within the health care sector, I ask that you remain calm and continue to exercise your duties and responsibilities as per normal and without prejudice.

The threat to the Wits Community is considered low at this stage, but outbreaks of this nature require caution. Unless you have travelled to coronavirus hotspots such as Wuhan in China or Italy within the last 14 days or have come into contact with a known infected person, there is little cause for alarm. However, travelling abroad whether for study or leisure carries potential risks. Countries currently not experiencing any cases of infection could suddenly be declared high-risk areas, with immigration barriers to returning home to South Africa. While the Faculty or University has not issued any travel restrictions for staff or students, I urge you to exercise caution in this regard. Symptoms of the virus include fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath.

Practicing these simple preventative steps as part of your daily routine will help curb the potential spread of communicable diseases:

- Wash your hands regularly with soapy water for more than 20 seconds ([read this article for more on the importance of hand-washing](#)).
- Avoid sharing anything that has come into contact with saliva, whether in your living or social environment.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow.
- Get adequate sleep and eat well-balanced meals to ensure a healthy immune system.

If you feel unwell or suspect you may have been infected with the virus, stay at home and avoid public spaces. Contact the **NICD hotline via 0800 029 999** immediately, who will advise you further on the next course of action. Students who are feeling anxious or require assistance with any of the preventative measures are requested to be in touch with the Office of Student Success.

Rest assured that your safety is our highest priority. From next week, all Faculty of Health Sciences buildings' entry and exit points will be fitted with hand sanitizer dispensers. If you are of the means, use personal hand sanitizers with an alcohol content of 60% and above.

As difficult as it may be, let us try to remain calm and vigilant in the face of this global health issue.

Sincerely

Professor Imraan Valodia

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