

Dear Colleagues and Students

Good Evening!

The Wits COVID-19 management committee convened this morning to discuss the University's preparedness to respond to the emerging infectious disease. The committee discussed matters related to the prevention, detection, containment and mitigation of COVID-19, as well as protocols and processes that need to be in place should a COVID-19 case or outbreak develop.

### ***We have an emergency response plan***

The Occupational Health and Safety Office has developed an Emergency Response Plan, which the committee will use as a basis from which to develop appropriate responses to COVID-19. The committee will actively monitor the spread of COVID-19 and adapt the University's plans accordingly.

### ***We know that the virus is in SA, but there is no need to panic***

All 13 South African cases are mild cases (in fact 80% of all global cases are mild), and there are no critical cases in the country to date. All South African cases are "imported cases" and were contracted abroad before the travellers entered South Africa. There have been no local community transmission cases yet. Interestingly, young people seem not to be the drivers of COVID-19, although they generally spread influenza pretty quickly! The elderly and those with respiratory infections and compromised immune systems are generally most at risk.

### ***The most sensible thing to do now is to:***

1. Take care of your personal hygiene – wash your hands often, thoroughly (sing two happy birthdays whilst washing)
2. Keep a safe social distance (about 1 metre) from a person who is coughing or sneezing.
3. If you happen to have a cough, fever, splutter and have difficulty breathing visit your healthcare professional and follow their advice. Call ahead so that they are prepared to receive you.
4. It goes without saying that you should not share your germs, so cover your mouth and nose if you are coughing or sneezing.
5. If you feel that you are still at risk or if your healthcare professional believes that you may have COVID-19, contact the NICD directly on this number: **0800 029 999**  
There are no over the counter testing kits – the tests have to be analysed in a laboratory.

### ***Does everyone need a mask?***

No. Masks should be worn if you are coughing or sneezing and if there is a risk that you can pass the infection on to others. Healthcare professionals should be equipped with the appropriate masks, gloves and other protective gear.

### ***Don't know what to believe?***

Everything that you read on Twitter or Facebook may not be true. Even Instagram images and TikTok videos are doctored. There is also a "Wits Corona Task Team" WhatsApp group doing the rounds – this is not an official source of communication and we can't guarantee that the content that they generate is true. Rather try these credible sources:

National Institute for Communicable Diseases – [www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/](http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/)

World Health Organization - [www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)

Listen to this masterclass led by Prof. Cheryl Cohen from the NICD:  
[www.702.co.za/articles/374077/listen-a-masterclass-on-pandemics](http://www.702.co.za/articles/374077/listen-a-masterclass-on-pandemics)

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or read this article by Wits Professor of Vaccinology, Shabir Madhi on COVID-19 in order to find out how big and bad it really is: <http://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/opinion/2020/2020-03/coronavirus-how-big-how-bad-and-what-to-look-out-for.html>

Keep washing, keep safe!

**The COVID-19 Management Committee**

**11 MARCH 2020**