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[IFH Hygiene Advice Sheet: Coronavirus - What you can do to protect yourself against infection – and how to make sure you don't spread infection to others](#)

As always, when a potentially pandemic strain, such as the coronavirus (COVID-19), emerges, hygiene, both in home and everyday life settings as well as in hospitals plays a vital role mitigating spread before measures such as development of vaccines and effective antivirals can be put in place.

So far infection is still mainly contained in China, but the number of cases outside China is now increasing - mainly in Asian countries, but also in Europe, North America, Australia and across

the world. The next few days and weeks will be critical in determining whether, how quickly and how widely the infection will spread. In all countries that are affected, this will depend on the robustness of public health systems, but equally it will depend on the extent to which health authorities can persuade the public that their part in halting the spread of the epidemic through practising good hygiene is absolutely vital.

To meet the need for effective hygiene in home and everyday life, IFH has produced a Hygiene advice sheet: [What you can do to protect yourself against infection – and how to make sure you don't spread infection to others](#)

Experience has shown that keeping hygiene advice simple is vital if we are to get people to comply. In the UK, this advice centres on good respiratory hygiene (catch it, bin it, kill it). This advice is based on the assumption that the major route of spread is via contaminated respiratory droplets which are expelled by coughing and sneezing.

But the success of this strategy depends on the level of respiratory hygiene compliance by “infected” people, who, it seems may not actually know they are infected for some time before symptoms appear. The advice sheet thus contains further advice aimed at helping all of us protect ourselves from becoming infected. This is particularly important for people who know they are more likely to encounter an infected case (e.g. when they are caring for or living with people who are ill or quarantined, or when we are “confined” in public places for sustained periods of time with large numbers of people). This advice sheet identifies the key things we can do both at home and in our everyday lives, to protect against becoming infected. This is particularly important in aeroplanes which are the “incubators” for spread of infection from one country and region to another.

This additional advice assumes (based on evidence) that surfaces also become contaminated with contaminated droplets from people who are infected - most particularly the hands but also environmental surfaces. From this people can become infected by touching their eyes, nose and mouth with contaminated hands. The hygiene advice thus includes practices for decontamination of hands – either by handwashing with soap or using an alcohol hand sanitizer – and for decontamination of surfaces frequently touched by others.

One question which does not seem to have an answer is “Why do people appear to be spreading infection even though they are not yet showing respiratory symptoms”? If spread is via infected respiratory mucus, then how come they are spreading infection before they are producing mucous secretions which cause coughing and sneezing etc? One thing to look out for is whether the virus might also be spreading via the faecal-oral route. [It has been suggested](#) that, as for SARS, this coronavirus strain may also “infect” the gut, which means that faecal-oral transfer may be possible. At present however there is no good evidence to confirm or refute this. During the

SARS outbreak in 2003, an area particularly affected was Amoy Gardens, a housing estate in Kowloon where [there were indications](#) that the drainage and sewage system played a role in the quick spread of the disease at the estate. However, this was never proven.

New publication: Evidence underpinning the development of hygiene advice on prevention of the spread of coronavirus infection

These new publications review the scientific evidence base for the development of hygiene advice to prevent spread of coronavirus infection. They include data on the survival and transfer of the virus via hands and surfaces, and the efficacy of disinfectants against viral contamination on hands and surfaces:

- Sattar S. Human Pathogenic Coronaviruses: Understanding their Environmental Survival for better Infection Prevention and Control, a review by Dr. Syed Sattar. <http://www.cremco.ca/en-US/news/1044>
- Kampf G, Todt D, Pfaender S, Steinmann E. [Persistence of coronaviruses on inanimate surfaces and its inactivation with biocidal agents](#). *J Hosp Infect.* 2020 Feb 6. pii: S0195-6701(20)30046-3. doi: 10.1016/j.jhin.2020.01.022. [Epub ahead of print]

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