



## EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic: Envisaging community involvement through clearing myths

Koronavirüs hastalığı-2019 salgını: önyargıları temizleyerek toplumun katılımını öngörmek

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To the Editor,

The ongoing coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to overwhelm the health care facilities across different nations and this is quite alarming for a disease which was first detected on 31st December 2019 and subsequently from a cluster of pneumonia patients in the first week of January month in 2020 in the Wuhan city <sup>1</sup>. Since then, the transmission of the virus has happened at a swift pace, not only within the different provinces of the nation, but also to different nations. The available estimates suggest that as on 16 August 2020, a total of 21.2 million COVID-19 cases and 761000 deaths have been reported across all the affected nations and territories, with the European region and the American region being the most affected <sup>1</sup>.

Acknowledging the magnitude of the problem and the potential risk of international spread, the infection has been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern towards the end of January 2020 <sup>2</sup>. This step was quite essential as we are not very much sure about the epidemiological attributes of the disease and that most of the nation are lagging facilities which can detect the infection. It is high time that all the nations should start focusing on the disease preparedness and response action plan, which also includes strict implementation of International Health Regulations <sup>3</sup>. Even though, there is a significant need for strengthening of laboratory facilities, risk communication, surveillance

mechanism, risk communication, etc., the real challenge is to make the general people aware about the infection and the measures which they can adopt to prevent acquisition of the infection <sup>2,3</sup>.

The recent trends of the disease have clearly suggested that the disease cannot be contained by the public health authorities alone. As the disease is transmitted through close contact, it is imperative that the members of the community join hands with the public authorities. However, for that to happen the Government has to ensure that the prevailing misconceptions and myths are clarified <sup>4</sup>. The presence of these myths cannot be ruled out as the disease was novel in nature and most of the epidemiological, virological or clinical parameters of the disease were not known <sup>4</sup>.

This eventually led to circulation of lots of misconceptions and myths in various social media and other forums, that has eventually resulted in creation of an environment of fear, anxiety and disbelief among the masses. From a public health perspective, the active support from community is a must, and we just cannot or should not allow what happened to Ebola virus disease outbreak of 2014 <sup>5</sup>. This calls for the need to spread the right message among the general population on a global platform with an aim to clarify about all the prevailing myths and misconceptions about the disease right from the start (Table 1) <sup>4</sup>.

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**Table 1. Myths and Facts about COVID-19**

<b>Myths about COVID-19</b>	<b>Facts (Based on available evidence)</b>
It is not safe to receive a letter or a package from China?	No, it is not true as the virus does not survive long on letters and packages
The practice of regularly rinsing our nose with saline will prevent the infection	No
The practice of gargling mouthwash will protect from acquiring the infection	No
Domestic pets can spread the new coronavirus infection	No. There is no evidence available as of now. However, in general, washing our hands with soap and water after contact with pets is a healthy practice
Elderly age-group is more susceptible to the infection	People from all age-groups can acquire the infection. However, elderly people on account of the presence of other co-existing chronic diseases, becomes more vulnerable.
Vaccines against pneumonia will protect against the new coronavirus	No. The process of manufacturing a vaccine against coronavirus is still under process
Eating garlic will prevent infection with the new coronavirus	No
Transmission of the virus happens through food	No Only potential source of food-borne transmission is via the person who is handing over the food and is infected.
Application of sesame oil will prevent the entry of the virus in humans	No, sesame oil cannot kill the coronavirus
Antibiotics are effective in preventing and treating the infection	No, as COVID-19 is a viral infection
Specific medicines are available to prevent or treat the infection	No. The research is going on

The World Health Organization understands this concern and has been at the forefront to spread the correct message. Now, it is the responsibility of the national leaders and the policy makers to intensify the advocacy, communication and social mobilization activities, with an ultimate intention to clear the doubts and provide the facts <sup>3</sup>. However, it is important that we keep spreading the right message in real-time, even as we are uncovering many new aspects of the disease by each day.

This can be done by establishment of a risk communication mechanism in the nation and identification of a trustworthy spokesperson. The idea is to spread the right information to the general population and only that part of information which they require. This can be ascertained by conduction of needs assessment surveys among the community and then providing them with the basic facts, do's and don'ts and what all can be done by them to ensure that both acquisition of the infection as well as onward transmission can be prevented <sup>6</sup>. The desired message can be delivered to the people through

Government Websites or World Health Organization website or even via television, newspapers, panel discussions, display of the correct message in various airports / seaports, etc <sup>6,7</sup>.

In conclusion, the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has emerged as a global public health concern, and it is the need of the hour to make the general population aware about the facts pertaining to the disease so that we, including the community, fight against the disease together as a team.

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