

## **PROTECTING PREGNANT WOMEN FROM CORONA VIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID19) in Rural Communities of Sub-Saharan Africa**

### **KUWAKINGA WAJAWAZITO DHIDI YA VIRUSI VYA CORONA**

**Target group:** This factsheet is intended for medical staff and community health workers working in reproductive, maternal and newborn health and pregnant mothers who are literate enough to read and interpret this information. It is part of the efforts of the *JamboMama!* project to improve communication between healthcare providers and the expectant mothers and their communities about specific health concerns such as the present Covid19 pandemic.

**Purpose of this factsheet:** explain what COVID19 is, what it does, why expectant and breastfeeding mothers should try to avoid getting infected, how to reduce the risk of infection; what to do when someone in your household or yourself, have the symptoms.

### **What is a CORONA VIRUS ?**

#### **KIRUSI CHA CORONA NI NINI**

Corona viruses are viruses that circulate among animals but sometimes they change and use human beings as hosts. They have spikes all around, like a crown, and that is how they latch on to all surfaces easily, like spiky thorns in dry bushland. Before the present one, named COVID19, there were SARS and MERS, also corona viruses that began to infect human beings. They also caused respiratory infections including pneumonia.

Bats are host to a wide range of corona viruses. This is how these viruses can mix and change, scientists think. But not only bats are hosts. Other animals can also be hosts, for instance, the dromedary (camel). These animals act as an intermediate host and animal reservoir, and the virus can “jump” to humans who come in touch with these animals, dead or alive, or with their secretions and excrements.

Viruses are smaller than germs and they are more dangerous, because they can stay “asleep” for days or weeks until a new host comes along. Antibiotics are of no use against viruses. But since the virus can bring germs along, antibiotics are sometimes prescribed to prevent a microbial infection on top of the virus infection.

## How is this Corona Virus COVID 19 transmitted to pregnant women?

### JINSI VIRUSI VYA CORONA VINA VYOAMBUKIZWA

Current understanding about how the COVID-19 spreads, (that is the name scientists have given to the coronavirus that is making millions of people so ill today), is based on what is known about other corona viruses, but scientists are working hard to learn from the present virus behaviour in real time, so everyday you can learn new things about this *Covid19* virus.

1. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, but intermediate “waiting stations” for the virus can be any object that an infected person has touched and is then touched by another person.
2. Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 1,5 metre or 6 feet) through the air breathed out by the infected person.
3. Via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or inhaled into the lungs directly from the air. Or they fall on the body or clothes of bystanders who then may accidentally touch the virus and may bring it to their mouth, eyes, nose or ears. They also stay suspended in the air for at least 45 minutes after the infected person who sneezed or coughed has gone.

N:B Lesson learnt: just like everybody else, a pregnant woman can also get COVID-19 by person-to-person transmission or by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching her own mouth, nose, or eyes. As she also carries new life in her and we don't know if or how the foetus will be affected while she must be fit for the delivery, an expectant and nursing mom should take every precaution recommended, and others should take every precaution to avoid infecting her.

## How do I recognise the disease? Clinical Features of Covid 19

### DALILI ZA COVID 19

- For confirmed cases (laboratory test) of the new corona virus infection (COVID-19), reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death.
- Symptoms can include:
  - Fever
  - Cough (dry cough without phlegm)
  - Shortness of breath
- As far as we know now the symptoms of Covid19 may appear in as few as 2 days **or as long as 14 days** after exposure.



- It has been reported that many (but not all) Covid19 patients lose their sense of smell and taste.

Because the virus can keep quiet in a healthy person for up to two weeks without that person feeling sick or developing symptoms, it can spread very fast and wide.

This quiet hiding also makes it very hard for people to respect the rules of keeping your distance from another person, wash your hands thoroughly before and after touching something that is or will be touched by others, not share cup or spoon, and if possible each one eating from one's own plate. But these rules must be applied! If there are not enough plates in the house for everyone, the pregnant woman should get her own, and the elderly, and those who have a chronic disease such as high blood pressure, heart or lung problems, or diabetes, should also be treated with extra care and should themselves make an extra effort at avoiding contagion.

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## Coronavirus symptoms

2019 Novel Coronavirus identified in Wuhan, China



### Common signs of infection

- Fever
- Cough
- Diarrhea
- Shortness of breath
- Breathing difficulties
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms

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### Severe cases

- Pneumonia
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Kidney failure
- **DEATH**

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### Treatment

- No vaccines or antiviral drugs available
- Symptoms can be treated

Sources: WHO/CDC

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**Explanation.** If you look at the picture, you see that is like the flu or the common cold at first. The danger comes when it develops into pneumonia and other organs, especially the kidneys, also stop working. So if anyone has symptoms that look like flu or common cold during this pandemic, it should be treated as a very high infectious threat, as if it were COVID19: Strictly keep the recommended distance of 2,0 metre, respect all the hygiene rules and stay at home. Even at home, try to keep a distance from the others, especially from the elderly, pregnant women and those of your household who have heart problems, lung problems, kidney problems or sugar. **A pregnant woman should dare to ask others to respect the rules for her and her unborn child's sake.** Her husband should support her request with his authority.

If the house is too small to keep some distance form one another, don't face each other while talking so that no droplets may fall on the other person's face. Sleep in a position that those who share a bed or a mat breathe away from each other. If you don't have a tussue ready, sneeze or cough not in your hand but in your left elbow if you are right-handed and in your right elbow of you are left-handed, and turn away from someone else's face.

### **How Can Pregnant Women Protect Themselves From COVID-19?**

#### **JINSI WANAWAKE WAJAWAZITO WANAVYOWEZA KUJIZUIA WASIPATE MAAMBUKIZI YA KIRUSI CHA CORONA?**

No vaccine exists at present to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Recommended everyday precautions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases include:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
3. Stay home when you are sick.
4. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
5. If you don't have a tissue at hand, cough in your left elbow if your are right-handed and in your righth elbow if you are left-handed;
6. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray and wipe (doorknobs, light switches, telephones, utensils, farm tools, etc).
7. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, each time you come home from outside when you have been with other people or touched objects that other people have also touched, or you sat close to them; after going to the bathroom; before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. These "other people" are also your own family whether living in the



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same household or just visiting. Keep visitors away, and if they must come, not more than 2 at a time!

### **What is the best way to wash hands properly?**

#### **NJIA ZIPI SAHIHI ZA KUSAFISHA MIKONO?**

Step 1: Wet hands with running water

Step 2: Apply enough soap to cover wet hands

Step 3: Scrub all surfaces of the hands – including back of hands, between fingers and under nails, and scrub the thumbs separately – for at least 20 seconds.

Step 4: Rinse thoroughly with running water

Step 5: Dry hands by shaking them, with a single-use towel or a clean cloth.

N.B. You could cut up an old clean sheet (hot-ironed) or towel into small pieces so that you can throw it away like a paper towel after use. Or you make smaller towels, each member of the household having his own, choosing a different colour and design for each person, or pegs with each person's name. Change the minitowels frequently, washing them or making new ones.

If there is no running water, make sure you have a clean kettle with a spout from where you can pour water over your hands. You wash your hands above the basin and that water you throw away safely, in the toilet for instance. Even better if one pours while the other one washes, then switch roles.

Wash your hands often, especially before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and after going to the bathroom.

If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Hand sanitizers can make your skin raspy, your hands lose their protective film so when possible use soap and water. Always wash hands with soap and water, if hands are visibly dirty.

### **Can Pregnant Women Pass this Virus To Unborn Children?**

#### **JE WANAWAKE WAJAWAZITO WANAWEZA KUWAAMBUKIZA WATOTO AMBAO HAWAJAZALIWA KIRUSI CHA CORONA**

At this time, we don't know yet whether the virus is transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy, or if the virus can harm the unborn baby once it has entered the amniotic sack. Though scientists can't tell yet HOW dangerous it may be, pregnant women should at all times take the recommended precautions to protect themselves



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from exposure to the virus. If they feel unwell, even just tired with flu like or common cold like symptoms, they should seek advice from a medically trained person quickly. If she is on the **JamboMama!** programme she should contact her referent health worker through the **JamboMama!** App. If she is experiencing more serious symptoms, such as fever, cough or difficulty in breathing she should go to the nearby health facility. If the mother is seropositive, diabetic, asthmatic, has high blood pressure or some other chronic condition it is urgent for her to seek help and advice.

### **Can Nursing Mothers Transfer COVID 19 To Their Children?**

#### **WANAWAKE WANAONYONYESHA WANAWEZA KUWAAMBUKIZA WATOTO WAO VIRUSI VYA CORONA**

It has already been discovered that young babies (below 1 year) are vulnerable to this virus. All mothers in affected and at-risk areas who have symptoms of fever, cough or difficulty breathing, should seek medical care early. They must follow the rules of hand hygiene and take preventive measures to protect their baby from COVID 19, covering their mouths, washing their upper body, anywhere where the baby touches with soap and water before nursing, using a clean cloth to wipe off the baby or herself.

Because breastfeeding is so beneficial and breast milk plays only a minor role in the transmission of other respiratory viruses, we recommend the mother continues breastfeeding, while applying all the necessary precautions.

Mothers with symptoms of the Covid19 virus who are well enough to breastfeed should wear a mask or use a piece of clean cloth to cover her mouth and nose when handling the baby (including during feeding); they should wash their hands before and after contact with the baby (including feeding), and regularly clean/disinfect contaminated surfaces. This should be done in all cases where anyone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 interacts with others, including children.



If a mother is too ill, she should be encouraged to express milk in a clean cup and give it to the child directly with a clean spoon – all the while following the same infection prevention methods. A trusted person, respecting hand hygiene very strictly, may have to help her with this. The Health Provider and Community Health Workers on the **JamboMama!** programme can show her how to use a clean cloth to cover the mouth and nose while nursing.



**REMEMBER – WUHAN ! the place in China where it all started!**

W - Wash hands

U - Use mask properly ( or cloth that covers mouth and nose)

H - Have temperature checked regularly

A - Avoid crowds

N - Never touch your face (or that of your baby) with unclean hands

**Conclusion**

Pregnant women should not skip their ANC visit at their nearby health facility because of the virus, nor give birth at home. They should continue to communicate with their referent health worker regularly through the **JamboMama!** app. Their Community Health Workers are to assist them with using the app on their SAHFA smartphones. The Ante Natal Clinic attendants will prepare the waiting area so that mothers can keep their distance while waiting and provide a correct handwash facility for the patients and for themselves. They can further reduce crowding by having a number of mothers come to the clinic for a physical check-up while the others are contacted through the **JamboMama!** app. At the next clinic, they switch attending in person and being called through **JamboMama!** This depends of course also on the health status of each mother.



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