

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

06 March 2020

Dear staff and students

Yesterday, the Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize announced that the first case of coronavirus in the country was confirmed in Kwazulu-Natal.

Whilst the Health Department and medical experts are advising all South Africans to remain calm, it is important that you are aware of the symptoms related to COVID-19 (coronavirus) and what you should do to protect yourself. Importantly, you also need to be aware of the steps that you should follow, if you think that you may have contracted the coronavirus.

The coronavirus causes respiratory illness in people. It was first identified in Wuhan, China and it has since spread quite rapidly to most parts of the world.

You need to take into consideration that COVID-19 can spread from person to person. This usually happens through respiratory droplets - when someone with the virus coughs or sneezes, and you breathe it in. Most often, you need to be close to the person (within 6 feet) for it to spread this way. It might be possible to also get COVID-19 by touching a surface, or object, that has the virus on it and then, by touching your own mouth, nose or even your eyes.

Common Signs of the infection

1. Respiratory symptoms
2. High Fever
3. Cough
4. Shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.
5. Severe cases of the infection can cause pneumonia
6. Severe acute respiratory syndrome
7. Kidney failure

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has published some basic protective measures against the new coronavirus

Wash your hands frequently

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

Maintain social distancing

- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.

Why? When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain the virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

Practice respiratory hygiene

Make sure that you and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow, or with a tissue paper, when you cough or sneeze. Then safely dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Why? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early

- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance.
- **Please call the NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NICD) on their toll-free, 24-hour hotline that has been established to assist you with your coronavirus queries on 0800 029 999.**
- You can also access relevant and credible information via the NICD website by clicking this link: <http://www.nicd.ac.za>

How to Prevent Infection Spread?

1. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
2. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness.
3. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
4. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Stay at home when you are sick and try and keep your distance from others at home.
6. Try to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces regularly.
7. Please try and avoid contact with farm or wild animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat)
8. If you present with any of the symptoms, call the NICD 24-hour toll-free phone line on **0800 029 999** and seek medical attention.

Please also be cautious about spreading fake news and misinformation. You should always verify the sources of the news and information that you are receiving, before circulating it to your family, friends and colleagues.

Source:

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://medlineplus.gov/coronavirusinfections.html>

<http://www.nicd.ac.za>