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Minister of Public Health tours HMC’s Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology

HEALTH CHECK TEAM
DOHA

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mid the healthcare sector’s ongoing measures to combat coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Qatar, Minister of Public Health HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al Kuwari, recently met with staff at Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology (DLMP).

Dr al Kuwari said Qatar has appropriately prioritised diagnostic testing and supported the laboratory response network to ensure the ability to test for potential cases of COVID-19, and protect the population.

As of March 22, over 10,800 people in Qatar had been tested for COVID-19. The State’s proactive programme of testing means Qatar has one of the highest testing rates in the world.

The minister said that Qatar is committed to being open and transparent throughout the testing process, and that data is now regularly published on the website of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

She said local testing capacity was an important step in speeding up the testing process so that the information needed to respond quickly and efficiently is available. According to her, HMC’s DLMP is an essential part of Qatar’s COVID-19 preparedness and response plan.

Explaining the COVID-19 testing process, Dr Ajayeb al Nabet, Chairperson of the DLMP said, “Very early on we quickly mobilised resources, equipment and staff to rapidly and effectively respond to this issue. HMC’s laboratories now operate round-the-clock in three shifts to process tests for suspected COVID-19 cases. Results are issued at 9am, 5pm and 10pm daily and critical cases can be tested on an individual basis. We are also in the process of introducing new equipment that will enable us to do fully automated, round-the-clock testing that will significantly reduce the length of time it takes to get test results.”

“The DLMP has a team of highly qualified consultants, scientists and technical staff who have evaluated many systems to ensure we have the best technology required to detect viruses like COVID-19. The DLMP performs over 20.5 million tests each year, providing a comprehensive range of specialised laboratory services for the people in Qatar,” added Dr Al Nabet.

The DLMP’s extensive laboratory network has been accredited by the College of American Pathologists (CAP) since 2014. The international body provides the world’s most recognised laboratory accreditation programme, which is considered the global gold standard for laboratory management.

The Ministry of Public Health has set up a dedicated, round-the-clock call center to answer all questions and inquiries related to COVID-19. The hotline number is 16000 and is toll-free. Any resident who experiences fever, cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, and has traveled to countries affected by coronavirus, or had contact with an infected person, in the last 14 days should immediately call the MoPH hotline.

The MoPH has stated that people should follow five basic infection control practices to protect themselves and others from COVID-19.

1. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, particularly after touching objects when you are outside or after shaking hands.
2. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze, and dispose of used tissues.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.
4. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illnesses.
5. If you experience symptoms including cough, sneezing, and fever, limit your contact with other people.

Quarantine facilities offering excellent services in Qatar

The facilities in Qatar that are being used for quarantine against Coronavirus (COVID-19) to make sure that the disease does not spread further have excellent services, according to the health officials. All suspected cases are being kept in the quarantine facilities and all necessary measures are being taken. PAGE 03

Take extra care against COVID-19 if you live with diabetes

Are you a person living with diabetes? If yes, you need to take extra precautions against coronavirus (COVID-19), according to Professor Abdul Badi Abou Samra, Director of the Qatar Metabolic Institute and Chairman of Internal Medicine at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC). He recently urged diabetics in the country not to panic but he said it was important they take extra precautions to guard against COVID-19. PAGE 06
Communicable Disease Center, a well-equipped facility to manage COVID-19

CATHERINE W GICHUKI
Doha

For the past few weeks, Hamad Medical Corporation’s Communicable Disease Center (HMC) Communicable Disease Center (CDC) has been the centre of focus as the facility has been receiving and treating patients with the coronavirus, COVID-19.

The state-of-the-art facility which was opened in 2016, the first of its kind facility in the region, has been able to manage a number of patients who tested positive for the virus.

The purpose-built facility is equipped to care for patients with rare or unknown, highly communicable diseases and any patient with suspected Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is admitted to the CDC while awaiting their test results.

According to health care officials the CDC is purpose built to manage patients with this type of condition and ensure that the condition does not spread to other people within the hospital or outside.

This is because the facility has negative pressure patient rooms and public spaces have hepa-filtration systems within the structure of standard and isolation rooms. This technique prevents cross-contamination from room to room. Besides, the HMC’s Ambulance Service has necessary vehicles and protective equipment to manage patients with COVID-19.

Health care officials including the Ministry of Public Health’s (MoPH) Director of Public Health Department Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Thani; co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee and Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) Head of Infectious Diseases Division Dr Abdullah al Khal; Director of Health Protection and Communicable Disease Control at the Public Health Department and co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee Dr Hamad al Rumaihi; CDC Medical Director Dr Muna al Maslamani and others have been giving briefs regarding the pandemic.

Sheikh Dr al Thani said that Qatar has been preparing for this for the past few months in the Legatum Prosperity Index 2019. Qatar’s primary health care, secondary and tertiary care and ministries are working together.

Co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee and Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) Head of Infectious Diseases Division Dr Abdullah al Khal said that when people who didn’t have any history started to test positive, that’s when they realised that the virus had entered into the community and then they started quarantining and testing even those who didn’t have symptoms of the disease. “This is a demonstration of the effectiveness of public health measures that are implemented because after three cases were discovered the Ministry of Public Health started immediately implementing early detection and containment measures to contact persons.”

According to Dr al Khal, they have been tracing people who were in close contact with the confirmed cases at their residences and work places and they screened them and put them on quarantine.

Director of Health Protection and Communicable Disease Control at the Public Health Department and co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee Dr Hamad al Rumaihi assured that they will maintain communication with the public through holding press conferences, statements and also the hotline (16000) which is in operation 24 hours 7 days a week. “All updates on the current situation will be posted on our website. Our website also contains guidelines for all healthcare facilities, including directions on disinfecting non-clinical areas.”

Early detection is the key to curb the spread of COVID-19: Health officials

CATHERINE W GICHUKI
Doha

EARLY detection is the key to curb coronavirus, COVID-19, health officials said recently.

Since the first cases were confirmed in the community, the health officials have been doing contact tracing to quarantine and test those thought to be in close contact with the cases.

So far, hundreds of people have been traced and tested, and some who didn’t have any symptoms tested positive.

According to the health officials, if these cases were not diagnosed early, they would have spread more into the community.

Ministry of Public Health’s (MoPH) Director of Public Health Department Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Thani said that they were tracing all people who have had a close contact with the confirmed cases. He asked anyone who would be called to come forward to be tested and to be cooperative for his own good and the community. “We want to control the spread of the virus.”

Sheikh Dr al Thani urged people to avoid unnecessary travels outside the country.

He said that the virus is not a death sentence and many people have been cured.

He said that if people have been in contact with the cases whether with symptoms or not, they have to be quarantined.

According to Sheikh Dr al Thani, Qatar has a very advanced healthcare system that was ranked fifth in the world. He thanked the medical team and other sectors for collaboration and assured the public that the team was doing their best to treat the cases as well as providing the necessary information for protective measures.

Dr al Maslamani said that if a confirmed case tests negative, the test is repeated again within 24 hours to make sure the patient is cured of the disease.

Dr al Khal urged the public to adhere to the protective personal hygiene preventative measures including frequent hand washing with soap and water; avoiding touching ears, nose and mouth; sanitising hands or using alcohol-based wipes; practicing social distance; avoiding social gatherings among others.

Dr al Rumaihi said that the COVID-19 hotline (16000) is operational 24 hours 7 days a week.

The officials however urged the public not to rush to be tested. Except when they have been in contact with a person who tested positive of the virus, they should not visit a healthcare facility. Instead, they should call the hotline.

For more information regarding COVID-19, visit www.moph.gov.qa or call 16000.
Infection control teams offer advice to the public at City Center Mall on protecting themselves from infection

Quarantine facilities offering excellent services in Qatar: Health officials

Catherine W Gichuki

THE facilities in Qatar that are being used for quarantine against Coronavirus (COVID-19) to make sure that the disease does not spread further have excellent services, according to the health officials. All suspected cases are being kept in the quarantine facilities and all necessary measures are being taken.

Speaking at a press conference recently the health officials including the Ministry of Public Health’s Director of Public Health Department Sheikh Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Thani; co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee and Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) Head of Infectious Diseases Division Dr Abdul-latif al Khal; and Director of Health Protection and Communicable Disease Control at the Public Health Department and co-chair of the National Epidemic Preparation Committee Dr Hamad al Rumaihi, said the services were excellent.

Sheikh Dr al Thani said those being quarantined are offered excellent services. “They have their phones, WiFi, and they can speak to their families from far away and not in close contact. They are served well.”

He added that they can call if they need to be served any kind of food they want. “Food or anything, they can order from outside.”

According to him, there are several locations which are being used for quarantine including a hotel and several buildings in the country in different areas. We have big and small areas that can cover hundreds of people for quarantine.”

Sheikh Dr al Thani assured the entire community that they are doing all that is required for the well-being of the country. “We are mitigating the disease, lowering the chance of the cases to come to Qatar.”

He added that all measures have been put in place to protect those offering services at the quarantine facilities from contracting the virus. “These teams are connected by the leader from the communicable disease and the public health department to ensure that the system has proper guidelines. Different swabs are taken from them before they leave that place.

“Care attendants and food service staff have been fully trained in infection control protocols. We are monitoring staff who have close contact with suspected cases closely and are ready to test them, if needed.”

Dr al Rumaihi said quarantine facilities are ready for the immediate transfer of passengers arriving from endemic countries. “Our team is on site and conducting regular checkups of passengers. In addition to teams who are monitoring incoming travellers, we also have teams who are equipped to help travellers with other medical needs, for example to talk to them about the management of any chronic conditions they may have, assist with refill prescriptions, etc.”

According to the officials, those in quarantine are really cooperative with the health authorities and there is no difficulty in persuading them to remain for the duration of the quarantine. This is because they understand why it is in their interest to ensure their health and safety in addition to ensuring the safety of their family members and society as a whole.

HEALTH CHECK TEAM

DOHA

A part of Hamad Medical Corporation’s ongoing community awareness campaign, members of the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) recently manned a booth at City Center Mall to educate the public about good infection prevention and control practices. The IPC team offered advice and handed out educational leaflets, highlighting key tips for people to follow to protect themselves and others from infection.

Executive Director of Corporate Infection Prevention and Control at HMC, Dr Jameela al Ajmi said, “Germs are a natural part of our daily lives and are present in the air, soil, and water, as well as in the human body. Not all germs cause infection and many germs live in and on the human body without ever causing harm. However, a small number of germs are known to cause infection, and this is why we need to follow good infection control practices.”

Dr Al Ajmi explained that an infection can occur when germs enter the body and increase in number causing reaction to the body. “Common viral infections including influenza, the common cold, chickenpox and measles can all be transmitted from person to person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. For this reason it is essential that people follow a number of basic infection control practices to protect themselves and others from the spread of infection.”

The IPC team at City Center Mall advised the public to wash their hands regularly with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, particularly after touching objects when you are outside or after shaking hands. They also warned against touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.

Food or anything, they can order from outside.”

“Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze, and dispose used tissues.”

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.

Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illnesses.

If you experience symptoms including cough, sneezing, and fever, limit your contact with other people.
HOW PREPARED IS QATAR’S HEALTH SECTOR TO DEAL WITH A POTENTIAL OUTBREAK OF COVID-19?

Qatar's healthcare sector is strongly prepared to manage a potential outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. HMC’s Ambulance Service staff have been fully trained to safely transfer and manage patients with this type of communicable virus, while preventing further spread. The Ambulance Service has the necessary vehicles and protective equipment to manage patients with COVID-19.

Any patient with suspected COVID-19 is taken to HMC’s Communicable Disease Center for treatment and monitoring while the test is carried out. The Communicable Disease Center is purpose-built to manage patients with this type of condition and ensure that the virus is not spread to other people within the hospital or outside.

Healthcare workers across the country have been specifically trained to manage any potential outbreak and efforts to strengthen infection prevention and control, case management and laboratory procedures have been prioritized. Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been planned as a contingency.

SHOULD I CALL 999 FOR INFORMATION OR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)?

No. The 999 number is for medical emergencies requiring immediate medical attention and transfer to an emergency department. The Ambulance Service’s Medical Dispatchers receive hundreds of 999 calls each day from members of the public with urgent medical conditions and the 999 number must be prioritized for these lifethreatening situations.

HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)?

- Follow the social media accounts of the Ministry of Public Health, Hamad Medical Corporation and Primary Health Care Corporation where any new updates will be posted.
- Call the national COVID-19 hotline on 16000 for all enquiries. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
STOP! COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) CALL CENTER: 16000

Q. Who can utilize the call center?
A. Healthcare professionals and general public.

Q. What is the number to call?
A. 16000 (toll free)

Q. What are the operating hours?
A. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Q. What languages are spoken?
A. Arabic and English

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT OUR CALL CENTER:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2020

HOW SHOULD I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)?

Although there are no specific measures that the public should take at this time, people are reminded of the need to follow standard infection prevention and control measures. This includes regular hand hygiene and covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, especially as other respiratory viruses are common during winter. People should also avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

HOW DOES CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) COMPARE THE FLU OR COMMON COLD?

People with COVID-19, the flu, or a cold typically develop similar respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough, and runny nose. Even though many symptoms are alike, they are caused by different viruses. Because of their similarities, it can be difficult to identify the disease based on symptoms alone. That’s why laboratory tests are required to confirm if someone has COVID-19.

Unless the person experiencing these symptoms has travelled to China and other affected countries in the 14 days, there is almost no risk of them having COVID-19.
Take extra care against COVID-19 if you live with diabetes

ARE you a person living with diabetes? If yes, you need to take extra precautions against coronavirus, COVID-19, according to Professor Abdul Badi Abou Samra, Director of the Qatar Metabolic Institute and Chairman of Internal Medicine at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC). He recently urged diabetics in the country not to panic but he said it was important they take extra precautions to guard against COVID-19.

According to Professor Abou Samra people with chronic diseases, particularly diabetes, have lower immunity levels than healthy people. Therefore, it is important they take extra precautions by practicing good personal hygiene and not sharing food, glasses, and towels, and avoiding contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illnesses. They should also seek medical care in case they feel sick.

He explained that like other respiratory illnesses, COVID-19 spreads from one person to another through air droplets that are dispersed when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. The virus can also be spread through close contact with an infected person or by touching surfaces contaminated with air droplets and then touching the mouth or nose. “Therefore, hand hygiene and social distancing are essential for protection from COVID-19,” said Professor Abou Samra.

He added that in addition to taking precautions such as thorough hand washing and avoiding contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness, it was important that people with diabetes follow the guidance provided by their healthcare team for how to manage sick days. “It is important to make a list of your medications and their dosages. If you have type 1 diabetes, ensure you have a good supply of glucagon and ketone strips. It is also important to ensure you have enough insulin and medication for a couple of weeks, should you be too ill to get prescriptions refilled. If you are at risk for hypoglycemia, check your blood sugar as soon as you feel any symptoms and if your blood sugar is low, drink a cup of juice or have three pieces of sugar.”

Professor Abou Samra said patients should never hesitate to contact their doctor if they have questions about managing their diabetes, especially if they feel unwell. He says it is important to immediately contact your doctor if your blood sugar is over 300 mg/dl for two tests in a row in a two-to-eight hour period, if you find ketones in your urine, feel sleepier than usual, have trouble breathing, can’t think clearly, have diarrhea, have an infection, vision, speech, or balance problems.

“Most diabetics will be very familiar with how to care for themselves during sick days, but if they have any questions they should consult their healthcare team. It is especially important they talk to their doctor about any changes to their diabetes medications when sick, and also what medications they can take for colds, flu, viruses, and infections,” said Professor Abou Samra.
International Bowel Cancer Awareness Month in April

**HEALTH CHECK TEAM**
**DOHA**

As Qatar moves towards celebrating International Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, we look at how the country’s free Bowel Cancer Screening Service can help deliver a healthier nation.

Last year some 14,293 people in Qatar all aged between 50-74 underwent complimentary screening for bowel cancer. The screening is provided by Qatar’s Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) under its ‘Screen For Life’ programme - Qatar’s National Breast and Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. PHCC experts want more people to take up the screening. Healthy individuals who don’t experience any symptoms should also get screened, and repeat it every two years, as part of the National Health Strategy targets of reducing early deaths from cancer and other chronic diseases by 25 percent by 2025.

**The Bowel Cancer Focus**
Bowel cancer has been singled out for complimentary screening because it is the second most diagnosed cancer in Qatar, yet its early detection has been shown to lead to a 90 percent survival rate.

Bowel cancer is a common type of cancer in both men and women and global research shows that about 1 in 20 people will get it during their lifetime. Screening can help detect bowel cancer at an early stage, when it’s easier to treat. It can also be used to help check for and remove small growths in the bowel called polyps, which can turn into cancer over time.

**Preventative Measures:**
Everyone can reduce their risk of bowel cancer by simple lifestyle improvements. These include:
- Avoiding processed meat and limiting red meat intake, including beef, lamb and goat, to 500g a week
- Eating plenty of soluble fibre from wholegrains, pulses, vegetables and fruit. Aim for at least 30gms a day
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Staying hydrated. It’s recommended to drink between 6-8 glasses of fluid every day – water is best and avoid sugary drinks
- Exercising regularly by getting a moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 days per week (for at least 30 minutes).

**Risk Group**
PHCC’s focus on the 50-74 age group is because people older than 50 are considered at risk for bowel cancer. These are the people ‘Screen For Life’ calls up and invites for complimentary screening. Being outside this age group, however, does not mean you are immune from the disease. Anyone of any age who has symptoms should seek medical advice:

**Symptoms to watch for:**
These can include:
- Frequent blood in the stools;
- A change in bowel habits for no apparent reason;
- Persistent abdominal pain, bloating or discomfort after eating;
- Loss of appetite or significant unintentional weight loss.

**Forget Fear – Just Do It!**
Screening need not take up huge amounts of time. Those being tested at any of the PHCC screening suites at Al Wakra, Lebaib and Rawdat Al Khail Health Centers can make appointments in advance by calling the dedicated call centre on 800 112. This means they can move swiftly onto the screening process which should not take more than 15 minutes.

Screening is done via the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT). This involves providing a fecal sample which is later tested. During the appointment, the nurse will explain the importance of the test and how it is done, the participant will get the FIT kit, take it home where they will give 3 stool samples over 3 days. Then they can bring the samples back to the health center lab.

**After Testing**
Once the test results are back, the person examined is informed of them. If the results are normal, then the person tested only needs to repeat the procedure every two years. If the results are abnormal, the tested individual will receive a call for a follow-up appointment with PHCC doctors who will then refer them to HMC for colonoscopy.

People whose tests come back defined as ‘abnormal’ should not panic. Abnormal results do not necessarily mean the person has cancer. They mean that further tests should be undertaken which is why PHCC refers them to HMC doctors who determine whether the exam is normal, or if treatment is required. What people should keep upper-most in mind is that early detection does save lives!

Screening is a highly pro-active measure people can take to protect their long-term health and residents of Qatar are very lucky to have the nationwide ‘Screen For Life’ programme which is free of charge. By taking up the screening offer people are also helping the country achieve its target of making Qatar a healthier and happier nation.
Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer.

Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze, and dispose of used tissues.

Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness.

If you experience symptoms including cough, sneezing, and fever, limit your contact with other people.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.

Q: How to protect yourself and others from infection:

A:wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze, and dispose of used tissues. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness. If you experience symptoms including cough, sneezing, and fever, limit your contact with other people. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.

For more info. Visit www.moph.gov.qa or call (16000)