QATAR AT THE FOREFRONT OF CONTAINING COVID-19

Catherine W Gichuki

COVID-19 has become a global pandemic affecting almost all countries on the planet. Qatar too has reported COVID-19 cases. However, it is evident that Qatar is a notch higher when it comes to fighting the virus. Besides, the aggressive public awareness campaigns which include hand hygiene and social distancing, Qatar is far ahead of many other countries in terms of providing facilities and high-end medical care to all its citizens and residents, regardless of their nationality.

Recently, World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised the way Qatar is dealing with the coronavirus outbreak in the country. He congratulated Qatar’s leadership on how it was dealing to contain the virus and the efforts to implement a comprehensive approach to suppress and control the COVID-19.

In just few weeks since it reported its first case of COVID-19 on February 29, Qatar has been able to put up excellent facilities to help in the fight against the virus. Recently, Umm Slai quarantine compound comprising of 32 buildings with a capacity for 18,000 beds was built. The facility is equipped with safety, entertainment and necessary services to ensure comfort for the quarantined people.

Dr al Kuwari thanked the front-line medical teams for their efforts to confront COVID-19 and to protect the society. The health minister also thanked the community at large for following the precautionary measures laid down by the government to protect themselves and the wider community.

In addition, a 3,000-bed hospital was set up in 72 hours. Besides, Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) Hazm Mebaireek General Hospital (HMGH) was transformed into a COVID-19 facility. The hospital which initially had 118 beds increased its capacity to 267 within a short time. However, if need be the capacity can be increased to 560 beds.

In addition, Primary Health Care Corporation’s (PHCC) health centres such as Rawdat Al Khail, Muaither, Qanaria and Umm Sial Health centres were turned into COVID-19 test-and-hold facilities. Apart from the facilities, Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) activated a set of remote access channels at PHCC and HMC to provide remote healthcare services to their patients. In addition, PHCC, in collaboration with Q-Post started to implement the remote treatment plan which provides the Medication Refill Home Delivery service to all.

Do you need medication refill?

Are your medicines over and you need a refill? The medicines are just a WhatsApp message away. Recently, as part of the preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, Primary Health Care Corporation in partnership with Q-Post, started to implement the remote treatment plan, which is to provide the Medication Refill Home Delivery service to all patients through WhatsApp numbers allocated to each health center. PAGE 2

Are you pregnant during this time? Please take note

Although pregnant women are not thought to be at a higher risk for severe coronavirus disease, COVID-19, Hamad Medical Corporation experts have urged them to take precautionary measures seriously. HMC’s Women’s Wellness and Research Center’s Dr Hilaal al Rifai recently said that COVID-19 pandemic has understandably created stress and anxiety for pregnant women in the country. PAGE 7
Do you need medication refill?

Heath Check Team
Doha

Are your medicines over and you need a refill? The medicines are just a WhatsApp message away.

Recently, as part of the preventive measures to limit the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), in partnership with Q-Post, started to implement the remote treatment plan, which is to provide the Medication Refill Home Delivery service to all patients through WhatsApp numbers allocated to each health center.

This is to ensure that patients receive their required medications without having to visit the health centers or clinics, especially those suffering from chronic diseases and the elderly, who are targeted in the first phase of this service.

The Medication Refill Home Delivery service aims to reduce patients’ visits to health centers and support Qatar’s measures to stay at home in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Patients can also inquire about their prescriptions through the WhatsApp numbers from Sunday to Thursday from 8:00am to 2:00pm and from 4:00pm to 10:00pm, except on Fridays and Saturdays.

The delivery service was launched in its first phase for Qataris only and will be rolled out in phases to the rest of the population soon, and it is free for everyone. As for the medicines’ fees, it is free for Qataris, for those exempted from the payment of fees, and GCC citizens. As for those non-exempted from the payment of fees, the fees are expected to be paid for medicines only by using bank cards, and cash will not be accepted.

As for the implementation mechanism of this service, the communication will be between the patients and their health center’s pharmacy through the WhatsApp numbers, which have been announced and can be obtained from PHCC’s official accounts and websites to request the necessary medication, as well as medical injections (insulin). For any prescription-related inquiries or clarifications, the pharmacist will obtain some information about the patient to dispense the necessary medication, and deliver them, in collaboration with Q-Post, within two working days of receiving the request. The service is accessible for all cases and priority is given to patients with chronic diseases, the elderly, and those who need to re-dispense the medication periodically.

PHCC has reiterated its dedication to ensure the preservation of medicines and medical injections during the delivery process, where they will be special containers for preservation and storage. The delivery vehicles will also be equipped with a cooler to ensure safe medicine delivery. What is more, drivers will receive training on the right ways to transport medicines, for example, having air-conditioned cars and preparing labels with clear guidelines for drivers, such as “Keep Refrigerated” and “Fragile”, as well as Barcode labels to ensure that medication is delivered to patients appropriately.

PHCC will continue facilitating access to all services by the best means available, as well as providing quality medical care services for all citizens and residents of the State of Qatar in a timely and accurate manner.

Health centres turn into COVID-19 test-and-hold facility

I n the past few weeks as Qatar continues the fight against the coronavirus disease a number of Primary Health Care Corporation’s (PHCC) health centres have been turned into COVID-19 test-and-hold facilities. The health centres which have so far been turned into test-and-hold facility include Rawdat Al Khal, Muaither, Gharaffa and Umm Slal health centres.

The appointments for antenatal, Well Baby and Obstetric have been rescheduled in neighbouring health centres. For instance, for those who had appointments at Rawdat Al Khal, their appointments were rescheduled to Omar Bin Al Khatab Health Center. However, walk-in patients can go to health centres such as Omar Bin Al Khatab, Airport and Um Ghanwila.

All registered patients have been notified of the following:

For Al Gharaffa Health Centres, Well Baby and Obstetric Ultra sound appointments will now be rescheduled to Leabaib Health Centre. Walk-in appointment patients can visit nearby health centres including Madinat Khalifa, Leabaib, Al Daayen and Qatar University health centres.

Al Gharaffa test-and-hold Health center will operate 24 hours a day and Umm Slal test-and-hold centre will operate 7am to 11pm.
As Qatar continues with the fight against coronavirus disease, Hamad Medical Corporation’s Hazm Mebaireek General Hospital (HMGH) was recently designated as a COVID-19 treatment facility enabling HMC to provide high quality care for patients in one single facility.

Patients with COVID-19 experiencing moderate to severe symptoms get admitted to HMGH and they receive treatment to manage their symptoms while being closely monitored.

Minister of Public Health HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al Kuwari said that the rapid transformation of HMGH into a COVID-19 treatment facility was an example of the healthcare sector’s proactive approach to confront the pandemic.

“Right from the onset, we have acted quickly and decisively and put measures in place without delay. This is exactly what is needed to combat such a fast moving virus as COVID-19. I am proud of the efforts of the front-line team involved in getting HMGH operationally ready to provide high-quality care to patients with COVID-19."

According to the Chair of the COVID-19 System Wide Incident Command Committee (SWICC) Dr Saad al Kaabi, the decision to transform HMGH into a COVID-19 treatment facility is part of the healthcare sector’s proactive plan to ensure it can manage any potential escalation in the number of patients testing positive for the virus. “We have chosen HMGH to be our designated COVID-19 because it is one of HMC’s newest facilities and will provide a modern, state-of-the-art environment in which to treat male and female patients of all nationalities with COVID-19. These changes have been made for the benefit of all citizens and residents in Qatar and we ask people for their cooperation and understanding at this time.”

"the conversion of HMGH into a COVID-19 treatment facility, has a capacity of 167 beds including intensive care beds and inpatient beds to treat patients with COVID-19. The capacity can be increased to 560 beds if the need be. The facility also has a dedicated COVID-19 Emergency Department with the capacity of 150 beds should it be needed in the future."

The capacity in intensive care has also been increased from 16 beds to 50 beds (for males and females), he pointed out.

HMGH’s senior management team – Acting Medical Director for HMGH and Assistant Chair of the SWICC Dr Ahmed Ali al Mohammed, Executive Director Hussein al Ishaq, and Head of Infection Control Dr Nasser Ali Asad al Ansari - is leading the transformation plan for the hospital and working in close collaboration with HMC’s other hospitals, as well as the Ministry of Public Health, to ensure every measure is in place to provide the very best care to patients with COVID-19. “Our whole team has worked hard over the last week to transform HMGH which is built to the highest quality specification with our clinical teams ready to provide the highest quality care to all of our patients who need it,” said Dr Al Kaabi.
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PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

STAY HOME FOR YOUR SAFETY AND THE SAFETY OF YOUR LOVED ONES

Avoid all forms of social gatherings

Why we recommend avoiding all forms of social gatherings?

Gatherings increase your chances of getting Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) or spreading the virus to others.

By avoiding social gatherings, you are reducing close contact with others (such as hand-shaking); which is one of the main forms of spreading the virus.

Social gatherings increase the risk for the elderly, those with chronic conditions and those with low immunity, of suffering from severe health complications if exposed to COVID-19.

How can you stay in contact with others during this time?

Contact others using remote technology such as phones, internet, and social media channels.

DO YOUR PART AND BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR COMMUNITY

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM COVID-19 WHILE GROCERY SHOPPING?

1. Limit the grocery store visits to only one person and avoid taking children.
2. If your household workers are doing the shopping, explain to them the precautionary measures.
3. Make a grocery list prior to leaving your house.
4. To reduce the number of visits, purchase enough groceries to last 1-2 weeks. But do not over purchase to leave stock for others.
5. Ensure you always keep a distance of at least 2 meters between yourself and others.
6. Ensure you disinfect carts and baskets prior to use, or wear disposable gloves and throw them in a trash-bin immediately after use.
7. Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes while shopping.
8. Use electronic forms of payment instead of cash. Use a tissue when entering your pin number.
9. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
10. Place grocery bags in the trunk of your car and not on the seats of your car.
11. When you reach your home, dispose of the grocery bags immediately and wash the purchased items.
12. When you finish storing the products, wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

AVOID GOING GROCERY SHOPPING IF YOU:

• Are experiencing any flu-like symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, and fever
• Suffer from any chronic condition or low immunity
• Are an elderly person

For more info. on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), visit www.moph.gov.qa or call 16000
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10 WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME AT HOME

1. Spend quality time with your family. Children need a lot of emotional support during this time, so make sure to spend quality time with them.
2. Contact your friends and family. Use social media and online communication apps to stay connected with friends and family.
3. Invest in your mental and physical health. Find a new hobby or explore an existing one.
4. Read. There’s no better time to pick up a book and expand your horizons.
5. Do a little craft or art and crafts. It’s a great way to create something meaningful with others.
6. Enjoy your cooking skills. You can learn new recipes and healthy tips.
7. Stay active. Challenge yourself to do home workouts every day.
8. Take care of your mental health. Don’t forget to do things that you enjoy and hobbies.
9. Listen to playlists. In the last few years, the popularity of playlists has soared. There’s an endless range of playlists available on every music platform.
10. Recreate your former life. You can listen to a radio show about where you used to work and recreate the atmosphere.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTION WHILE UNDER HOME QUARANTINE

How to clean and disinfect clothing, towels, linens and other items that go in the laundry:
- For soft surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, remove visible dirt if present and clean with appropriate products indicated for use on these surfaces.
- After cleaning, launder items as appropriate using the warmest appropriate water setting for the item and dry items completely.
- Wear disposable gloves when handling dirty laundry and then discard after each use.
- Do not shake dirty laundry to minimize the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- Clean clothes, bed cloths, bath and hand towels, etc. using regular laundry soap and water or machine wash at 60 degrees to 90 degrees with common laundry detergent and dry thoroughly.

How to clean and disinfect surfaces and bathrooms:
- Hands must be washed using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after cleaning.
- Assign one person who is in good health without any risk conditions for cleaning and disinfection.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily (e.g., tables, chairs, doorknobs, light switches, remotes, handles, desks, sinks, and stovetops). For disinfection, use diluted household bleach solution (1-part bleach to 99-parts water). For surfaces that do not tolerate bleach, 70% ethanol or isopropyl alcohol can be used.
- Clean and disinfect bathroom toilets and toilets surfaces at least once a day.
- Use single-use gloves to pick up the order and dispose of it in the trash. After using gloves, wash hands and avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear rubber gloves, mask and protective clothing (e.g., plastic apron) when cleaning.
- Avoid contact with eye and skin when handling cleaning products and keep them away from children.

How to clean and disinfect dishes, glasses and other food service items:
- The person under home quarantine should eat in their room, preferably using disposable food utensils and throw them immediately after use.
- Non-disposable food utensils used should be handled with gloves and washed with hot water and soap or in a dishwasher.

Home quarantine information

How to home quarantine
The following advice will enable you to safely and effectively home quarantine.

- It is extremely important that you follow the rules of home quarantine. You have a responsibility and duty to protect yourself, your family, your friends, and the community as a whole.

How to isolate yourself
- Stay at home in a separate room to other family members, preferably one with an ensuite bathroom, and ensure proper ventilation.
- Avoid any contact with other family members.
- Don’t allow visitors into your house.
- Use your phone if you need to contact anyone else in the house.
- Ask others – a family members or friend – to run errands for you like buying food or medicine.
- You must not leave your house. In the event of a medical emergency call 999.
- Only one member of the family should be allowed to provide care to you. Your caregiver should wear a facemask and gloves every time he or she enters your room and should dispose of the mask and gloves and wash their hands immediately after leaving the room. A distance of at least one meter shall be maintained between you and your caregiver at all times.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO BE FOLLOWED WHEN USING HOME DELIVERY SERVICE

Prepare your meals at home at all times, and if you need to order through the home delivery service, make sure to:
- Ask the delivery person to leave the order in front of the door.
- Pay for your order online using a credit or debit card.
- If a receipt is used, it is preferable to pay the exact amount to avoid any change and it is requested not to receive food handles.
- Wear and throw food packaging paper, throw the bag in the trash.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20-40 seconds after handling them.
- Avoid any contact with other family members.
- Use single-use gloves to pick up the order and dispose of them. After using gloves, wash hands and avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear a mask and gloves every time you enter your house.
- Assign one person who is in good health without any risk conditions for cleaning and disinfecting.
- Hands must be washed using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after cleaning.

For more info. on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) visit www.moph.gov.qa or call 16000.
**Children look up to adults for guidance and how to react to stressful events**

Dr May Jassim al Muraisi, Executive Director of Clinical and Service Development at Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

According to Dr al Muraisi, parents and caregivers should let children talk about their feelings, reframing their concerns into the appropriate perspective. She said that teaching children positive preventive measures and talking with them about their fears can help reduce anxiety by giving children a sense of control over their risk of infection. “Parents often worry that talking to children about scary social issues may increase the child’s anxiety. Knowledge is a powerful tool and it gives children some predictability in knowing what lies ahead, which can help dull anxieties. Children need factual, age-appropriate information. They require concrete instruction, but it is important not to panic or overwhelm them,” said Dr al Muraisi.

When talking to children about COVID-19, Dr al Muraisi recommended asking your child what they know about the virus and letting that guide the discussion. “If they don’t seem too concerned, it probably isn’t necessary to have an in-depth conversation about it. Reinforce the importance of handwashing and model the correct handwashing technique for your child. Talk to them about personal space and tell your child to avoid people who are sick (coughing and sneezing). Tell your child to let you know if they are feeling unwell, but it isn’t necessary to go overboard with information.”

She however said that if your child voices worry or concern, correct any misinformation and provide them with emotional support. “Let their questions be your guide as to how much information you provide. Watch for signs of stress. In younger children, signs of stress can range from excessive crying or irritation to returning to behaviours they have outgrown, like bedwetting. In older children and teens, stress often manifests as excessive worry or sadness, acting out, and unexplained headaches or body pain,” added Dr a Muraisi.

According to her, very young children, for example, those under the age of three years old, will have a limited ability to understand information about COVID-19 but they can still experience the effects of stressful events in their environment, underscoring the importance of talking about the virus calmly and matter-of-factly. “It is important to use age-appropriate language. Try to avoid exposing children to media reports about COVID-19, as this can elevate their stress. News programmes are intended for adults, not children. Monitor their online activity.”

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**Quitting Smoking can boost immune system against viral infections: HMC Specialists**

Dr Ahmad al Mulla, Head of Tobacco Control Center, HMC.

Dr Jamal Abdullah, Smoking Cessation Specialist, Tobacco Control Center, HMC.

**HEALTH CHECK TEAM**

Doha

We know that children look up to adults for guidance and how to react to stressful events. Therefore, if parents seem overly worried, children’s anxiety may rise especially of the children that are prone to anxious thoughts. Executive Director of Clinical and Service Development at Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Dr May Jassim al Muraisi said that while parents and caregivers need to encourage their children to practice good health behaviours as part of helping to stop the spread of coronavirus disease, COVID-19, it is important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. “The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious situation and we all must do our part to limit the spread of this infection. However, adults should be aware that children will react to, and follow, their verbal and nonverbal cues. What you say and do about COVID-19, including your prevention efforts, can either increase or decrease your child’s anxiety,” said Dr al Muraisi.

Dr Ahmad al Mulla, said the Center will continue to offer support to those who are wanting to quit smoking by providing telephone-based consultations and treatment.

Dr al Mulla explained that residents seeking support to quit smoking can call 4025 4981 or 5080 0959 to book an appointment. He said patients will be called by one of the Center’s doctors who will conduct an assessment to determine the patient’s level of nicotine dependence. From there the doctor will develop a treatment plan and may prescribe medication that can be collected from one of HMC’s pharmacies using the automated medication dispensing system.

He further said that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced most people to change their daily routine by affecting their ability to go to work, school, the mosque, and even how they greet each other. He said while it can be a stressful period for many people, it is also an opportunity to quit the harmful habit of smoking, which can negatively impact a person’s health, both short- and long-term.

Dr Jamal Abdullah, Smoking Cessation Specialist at HMC’s Tobacco Control Center, said that all forms of smoking weaken the respiratory system’s natural defense mechanism and make smokers more vulnerable to viral infections. He said smoking can also lead to a slower recovery from these infections.

He added that smoking is also considered a risk factor for many diseases, including cardiovascular diseases and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It has been observed in China that a large number of reported deaths related to COVID-19 were in people with these chronic diseases. Dr Abdullah urged all smokers to quit the unhealthy habit to experience the benefits of smoking cessation and to boost their immunity against viral infections.
ALTHOUGH pregnant women are not thought to be at a higher risk for severe coronavirus disease, COVID-19, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) experts have urged them to take precautionary measures seriously. HMC’s Women’s Wellness and Research Center’s Dr Hilal al Rifai recently said that COVID-19 pandemic has understandably created stress and anxiety for pregnant women in the country. According to him, while pregnant women are not thought to be more susceptible to serious illness from the virus, they should take prevention very seriously. “We understand that all pregnant women will feel a great sense of anxiety about their health and that of their unborn baby. In general, pregnant women are more susceptible to illness than non-pregnant women, as pregnancy decreases the immune system’s response. Therefore, it is understandable that pregnant women may feel concern and confusion. However, from the information we currently have, it does not appear healthy pregnant women who contract COVID-19 will be more severely unwell than the general population.” Dr al Rifai noted that while healthy pregnant women do not appear to be more at risk for serious complications, should they contract COVID-19, it is nonetheless important that they take every precaution to prevent infection from COVID-19 and all other viruses. He added that pregnant women who have a severe chronic illness, such as heart, lung, or kidney disease are more at risk for severe COVID-19 illness (similar to other patients with chronic illness) and should speak to their doctor or midwife to ensure they are taking all necessary precautions. “If you are generally healthy and having a healthy pregnancy, there is no need for panic, but you should still do everything possible to prevent infection. Frequently wash your hands, using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol,” said Dr Al Rifai. Dr al Rifai says the bottom line is that there is still a lot that is unknown about COVID-19, particularly as it pertains to pregnancy, but it is known that practicing personal hygiene and safety procedures, including social distancing, can help prevent COVID-19 infection. 

— Dr Hilal al Rifai
HMC’s Women’s Wellness and Research Center

Are you pregnant during this time? Please take note

“If you are generally healthy and having a healthy pregnancy, there is no need for panic, but you should still do everything possible to prevent infection. Frequently wash your hands, using soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.”
How to protect yourself and others from infection:

- 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)