Health Minister lauds National Command Center in Qatar’s COVID-19 measures

MINISTER of Public Health HE Dr Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari has recently praised the National Command Center (NCC) for its important contribution to Qatar’s successful fight against COVID-19.

Dr Al Kuwari said since the onset of the pandemic the NCC has played a vital role in Qatar’s measures to protect the population from COVID-19. “The Center supports the Supreme Committee for Crisis, the National COVID-19 Committee and the different ministries in achieving their goals. It receives information from across the country and acts as our reference center and our information hub,” said Dr Al Kuwari.

Dr Al Kuwari further said, “I would like to thank His Excellency the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani, for his leadership and for making this state-of-the-art center, equipped with the most advanced technologies and a resourceful and talented task force available to us. I am deeply indebted to all the ministries and entities that have contributed to our national COVID-19 response.”

“Looking forward, it is very important for everyone to work together and stay vigilant. Now more than ever it is important to wear your masks, and keep your physical distance as the risk of spread of COVID-19 remains high,” explained Dr Al Kuwari.

During the visit to the NCC, the Minister of Public Health met with each of the key teams involved in the Center’s response and discussed the challenges they had experienced throughout the virus and their strategies to overcome them.

“Our teams at the National Command Center have been working 24-hours-a-day in collaboration with all government agencies to maintain security and safety during the pandemic under the supervision of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management,” said Major General Khalifa Abdullah Al Nuaimi, Head of the NCC.

“Qatar has shown great strength and resilience throughout the pandemic and this has been achieved through a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach to the country’s COVID-19 strategy. The Ministry of Interior is proud of the role the National Command Center has played in supporting Qatar’s health-care sector during this national crisis,” added Major General Al Nuaimi.
MoPH inspectors honoured by the Permanent Committee for the Management of Seaports

MoPH conducts COVID-19 environmental testing pilot

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has recently launched a novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) environmental testing pilot, in partnership with a number of governmental, educational and research institutions in Qatar, to support and enhance surveillance and contact tracing efforts.

During the pilot phase, innovative technology was used to collect surface, air, and waste water samples and test for the presence of COVID-19. Results will allow the authorities to detect the presence of the virus and monitor any potential spread earlier through its concentration in wastewater. It will also help assess the efficacy of cleaning protocols to remove viral contamination in different environments.

Environmental testing provides significant support for the epidemiological and contact tracing teams on the ground. It extends the reach of the contact tracing team beyond individuals who have been in contact with positive COVID-19 cases to areas and environments that the positive individual may have visited and as such present a risk.

The environmental testing research is one example of the innovative, evidence-based approach Qatar is taking in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results will inform the response and strategic planning moving forward.

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MoPH Director of Public Health Department Sheikh Dr Mohamed Hamad Al Thani said, “The immediate need is clearly to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic and support Qatar’s efforts with additional data to track the spread of the virus. However, in the longer term setting up such a national environmental screening infrastructure would go a long way towards screening the supply chain into Qatar and supporting screening efforts during the FIFA 2022 World Cup.”

According to Professor of Physiology and Biophysics, Senior Associate Dean for Research, Innovations and Commercialisation, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar Dr Rhaled Machaca, this pilot study highlights the established scientific base with diverse and complementary expertise in Qatar that has been built over the years through the efforts of the Qatari leadership, particularly Qatar Foundation and Qatar National Research Fund. “It further shows an effective collaborative effort in support of national needs and the ability of innovative scientific approach to advance the management of the epidemic in Qatar.”

The pilot study has been launched as part of the initiative taken by the Scientific Reference and Research task Force established as part of the response to Covid-19 in Qatar to provide the available scientific evidence to policy makers for their decision making. MoPH is supported in this project by eight organisations, namely Hamad Medical Corporation, Qatar University, Qatar Environmental and Energy Research Institute, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, Texas A&M University - Qatar, and Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar.
Dr Muna Al Maslamani
HMC Communicable Disease Center Medical Director

INCE August 1 those returning to Qatar from COVID-19 low-risk countries are expected to undergo a 7-day period of home quarantine following their return to Qatar. Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) is reminding the community of the precautions they should take at home to limit the spread of the disease.

According to the information collated in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, HMC and Primary Health Care Corporation, those in home quarantine should stay at home in a room with ensuite bathroom separated from other family members, and ensure proper and regular ventilation. They should also avoid any contact with other family members and should not allow visitors and pets into the house.

According to HMC Communicable Disease Center Medical Director Dr Muna Al Maslamani, those in home quarantine should use their phone if they need to contact anyone else in the house. “Ask others - a family member or friend - to run errands for you like buying food or medicine,” she said.

In addition, they must not leave their house and in the event of a medical emergency they should call 999. “Only one member of the family should be allowed to provide care to you. Your caregiver should wear a mask and gloves every time they enter your room and should dispose of the mask, and wash hands immediately after leaving.”

According to the advice, those undergoing home quarantine should avoid cooking or preparing food for others and should avoid entering the kitchen. “Eat your food in your room and avoid eating or drinking with other people in the house. Be careful to wash your dishes separately from others in the house. Make sure to eat healthy food that strengthens your immune system. Make sure to drink enough water (8-12 glasses a day).”

According to the advice, those undergoing home quarantine should avoid cooking or preparing food for others and should avoid entering the kitchen. “Eat your food in your room and avoid eating or drinking with other people in the house. Be careful to wash your dishes separately from others in the house. Make sure to eat healthy food that strengthens your immune system. Make sure to drink enough water (8-12 glasses a day),” she said.

In case one has a chronic health condition and requires regular medication, he/she should ensure to have adequate supply available at home.

> On arrival, avoid any form of physical contact with family members
> Allocate a separate room with an ensuite bathroom at home with adequate ventilation
> You should not leave your room during the quarantine period
> Download the Ehteraz app
> Do not allow visitors to your house during the quarantine period
> Use tissue for coughing or sneezing and dispose in a lined and closed waste bin
> Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
> Only one member of the family should be allowed to provide care to you
> Your caregiver should wear a mask and gloves every time they enter your room and should dispose of the mask, and wash hands immediately after leaving
> Use separate dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, beddings, and other items and wash these items separately from those used by other household members
> Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items at least once a day including tables, door handles and mobile phones
> Use gloves when cleaning. Dispose of the gloves and wash your hands thoroughly when finished
> Stay healthy by eating a healthy balanced diet, drinking enough water, and getting enough sleep
> Keep the public health team updated with your health status through their daily calls and regular home visits
> Inform them immediately if you develop any flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, body aches or change in taste or smell

Eat your food in your room and avoid eating or drinking with other people in the house. Be careful to wash your dishes separately from others in the house. Make sure to eat healthy food that strengthens your immune system. Make sure to drink enough water (8-12 glasses a day).
Gestational diabetes is preventable, says HMC senior consultant

CATHERINE W GICHUKI

ESTATIONAL diabetes (a condition in which blood sugar levels become high during pregnancy) is preventable, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) senior consultant has said.

Regular monitoring of body weight, blood pressure and baby growth are very important during pregnancy.

Speaking in a video titled, ‘Managing your gestational Diabetes during COVID-19 pandemic’, Dr Mohammed Bashir, a senior consultant of diabetes/endocrinology at HMC’s Women’s Wellness and Research Center, Hamad General Hospital and Qatar Metabolic Institute said that gestational diabetes is one of the most common conditions that impact pregnancies in Qatar and that one in 4 women will develop this condition. “Gestational diabetes is mostly caused by increase in body weight before pregnancy and excessive increase in body weight during pregnancy. Gestational diabetes does not cause any symptoms and the only way to discover is through regular screening. We are lucky that we have a national screening programme for all pregnancies to detect gestational diabetes.”

According to Dr Bashir, gestational diabetes is caused by increased body weight but the good news is gestational diabetes is preventable. “Reducing the weight before pregnancy and avoiding excessive gestational weight gain in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy can prevent gestational diabetes. Hence, we advice every woman to know the weight she is supposed to gain before she gets pregnant.”

Dr Bashir further said that gestational diabetes negatively impacts the pregnancy including the mother and the baby. “The mother is at high risk of developing high blood pressure, preeclampsia, ending up delivering early and with a caesarean section. The baby is at high risk of become large in size which can make the delivery quite difficult or increase the chances of having injuries to their shoulders or arms during delivery.”

He reiterated that babies who are delivered early are at risk of developing breathing difficulties and having low blood glucose which might require them spending a few days in a special unit.

According to him, “The impact of gestational diabetes extends beyond pregnancy. “One in two women with gestational diabetes will develop Type 2 within 5 years of delivery. One in 3 babies will develop Type 2 diabetes by the age of 35.”

Dr Bashir further said that the most important intervention in gestational diabetes is diet and exercise. “We draft meal plans and dietary plans to provide woman with all the important nutrients that she requires in order to have a healthy pregnancy. The amount of food is spread equally throughout the day in order to avoid increase in blood glucose.”

He reiterated that exercise is very important during pregnancy as well. “Thirty minutes of daily exercise goes a long way. It improves the body’s response to insulin and that will improve the blood glucose for up to 24 hours. Brisk walking is quite enough, whether it is done inside the house or outside.”

He added that it was important for a woman to reduce the chances of progressing into Type 2 diabetes after delivery. “Reducing the body weight between 5 to 10 percent within the first year of delivery will reduce the chances of progressing into Type 2 diabetes. Regular screening for diabetes is recommended for all women who have history of gestational diabetes.”

According to him, breastfeeding between 6 to 9 months reduces the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes in the future for both the mother and the baby by between 50 to 75 percent.
RAHA National Alzheimer’s and Memory Services Helpline is a free and confidential service to call and speak to caring and experienced professionals about Alzheimer’s disease and memory loss concerns. Call 40262222 from 8am to 3pm, Sunday to Thursday.

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**How to prevent heat stroke**

**CATHERINE W GICHIKI**

**DOHA**

As the summer season continues and temperatures continue to soar, it is easy for people to get heat stroke, a condition that occurs when the body overheats, usually as a result of prolonged exposure to or physical exertion in high temperatures.

Symptoms of heat stroke are having body temperature of 104°F (40°C) or higher, confusion or trouble thinking clearly, seeing or hearing things that aren’t real (hallucinating), trouble walking, seizures and passing out.

Heat stroke can also cause fast breathing or a fast heartbeat, skin redness and warmth, vomiting or diarrhea, muscle cramps or weakness and headaches.

A mild form of heat stroke is heat cramps which cause painful muscle cramps. Heat exhaustion can cause headaches, dizziness, feeling thirsty and tiredness, nausea, or vomiting.

In this regard Hamad Medical Corporation has shared tips on how to prevent heat stroke or other related illnesses.

1. Avoid being outdoors during direct sunlight, especially at noon.
2. Use sunscreen at least half an hour before sunlight exposure.
4. Wear sunglasses and cover your head.
5. Use an umbrella to protect your head and body from direct sunlight, especially at the beach.
6. Avoid doing physical activity outdoors at noon and exercise indoors during this time.
7. Drink at least 8 to 12 cups of water daily, even if you do not feel thirsty.

- Reduce the consumption of caffeinated drinks including coffee and tea and avoid energy and soft drinks.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet and increase consumption of vegetables and fruits as they are rich in vitamin, minerals and water.

**Ways to prevent heat stroke**

- **Drink at least 8-12 cups of water daily**
  - Benefits of drinking water:
    - Improves immunity.
    - Promotes weight loss and helps maintain healthy body weight.
    - Maintains healthy joints and bones.
    - Helps in getting rid of body toxins.
    - Prevents constipation.
    - Helps in regulating body temperature.
    - Hydrates skin.
    - Keeps hair and nails healthy.
    - Increases energy.
    - Reduces headaches.

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HMC’s Elderly Pharmacy Medication Delivery service supports the medication needs of patients over 70. Call 40264004 from 8am to 5pm, Saturday to Thursday.
Breastfeeding boosts baby’s immunity and beneficial to the mother: Dr Marwa

Catherine W Gichuki

As the world marked World Breastfeeding Week in early August, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) specialist said that breastfeeding was beneficial for both the mother and the baby. He said working mothers can still breastfeed exclusively for 6 months because breast milk can be stored.

Exclusive breastfeeding has many benefits for the child as well as the mother and the community.

The World Breastfeeding Week 2020, which was themed “Support breastfeeding for a healthier planet”, marked from August 1-7. The Breastfeeding Week was started by the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) in 1992 WHO/UNICEF. The main goal was to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding.

HMC Al Wakra Hospital Lactation Specialist Dr Marwa Samir Hamdy said the aim was to help increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding through increased awareness about the importance of breastfeeding, how it is good for mothers, babies, and the whole community.

She explained that exclusive breastfeeding means to feed babies only breast milk for the first six months and then continue to breastfeed after that with the introduction of complimentary food for 2 years.

“For babies the breast milk will protect the baby from lots of diseases. The breast milk is the first vaccination to the baby because it gives the baby antibodies from the mother which makes the baby’s body to be protected against a lot of infections.”

She said that many researches show that breastfed babies are more protected against a lot of diseases like allergies, eczema, asthma, obesity, type 1 or 2 diabetes, blood diseases (like leukemia), among others. “It is very helpful for the baby for it helps for the growth of all the systems. For instance the brain cells grow better with breast milk and it shows well especially with premature babies. Their IQ is higher if they are breastfed.”

Dr Hamdy reiterated that the systems grow digestive, renal, and endocrine and other systems and bones grow better with breast milk.

She said that for mothers it is also helpful because it can prevent haemorrhage that can happen after delivery; uterus to return back to its normal size; losing weight that the mother gained during pregnancy; and prevents after-delivery blues and depression that lots of mothers would be susceptible to.

Dr Hamdy explained that for working mothers, their babies can still be fed breast milk. “Babies are the ones who help the mothers to produce the milk by sucking so it will help the body to start producing the milk. A few days before she resumes to work after maternity leave, she can start pumping and storing her milk. Breast milk can be stored in the fridge for about 5 to 6 days and in the freezer for about 3 months. She can store some milk and while at work she can still pump the milk during her break time. Working mothers can still breastfeed exclusively for 6 months because breast milk can be stored.”

This year, HMC gave messages in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, of which 7 messages were prepared and are being distributed in social media platforms each day. The messages include: breastfeeding is the first vaccination for the baby, breastfeeding helps the mother to lose weight that she gained during pregnancy, breastfeeding helps to protect children against lots of diseases, working mothers can breastfeed because breast milk can be stored, the mother can always ask for help, among others. “Our aim is to encourage this because through this we will have healthy individuals and healthy community.”

Choose water instead of sweetened drinks or juices to maintain weight and healthy teeth

Choose water more often than other types of beverages. Drink more water in hot weather and when active

- Drink 2-3 litres (8-12 cups) of fluid each day, choosing water often.
- Choose water as a drink with meals.
- Choose water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages to help maintain your weight and the health of your teeth.
- Choose water instead of other beverages when eating out to reduce calories.
- Add a squeeze of lime or lemon to enhance the taste of water.
- Breastfeeding women need to drink about 1 litre more fluid per day.
- The elderly are especially prone to dehydration and should drink 8-12 cups of fluid per day, even when not thirsty.

(Source: WWW.MOPH.GOV.QA)
Do you need help to quit smoking? Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has recently launched a smoking cessation telephone consultation service for those who are willing to quit smoking. This service provides patients with treatment, medications, and behavioural support to ensure they are effectively empowered to sustainably stop smoking.

According to PHCC, smokers are also likely to be more vulnerable to novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as the smoking increases the possibility of transmission of virus from hand to mouth. Smokers may also already have lung disease or reduced lung capacity which would greatly increase their risk of serious illness and poor outcomes if they contract COVID-19.

A healthy lifestyle will make all bodily functions work better, including immunity. Eating healthy diets, with plenty of fruit and vegetables, keeping physically active, quitting smoking, and getting enough sleep are key components of a healthy lifestyle. The benefits of quitting smoking will not end when this pandemic is over. For those who quit smoking now, there are countless health benefits that will impact them for the rest of their lives, including a lower risk of developing chronic disease and longer life expectancy.

Besides, handwashing, social-distancing, and staying at home, quitting smoking now is one of the healthiest steps people can take to reduce the risks associated with COVID-19.

To book a smoking cessation telephone consultation, please call PHCC on 107.

Long-term symptoms, complications of COVID-19

Some of the possible long-term effects can affect even patients who are asymptomatic or have mild cases of COVID-19. "I think it's an argument for why we take this disease so seriously," says Dr Poland. "People who are thinking, especially young people: (It's) a mild disease, you know. I might not even have any symptoms, and I'm over it. Whoa. The data is suggesting otherwise. There's evidence of myocardial damage, cardiomyopathy, arrhythmias, decreased ejection fractions, pulmonary scarring and strokes. And then in the more acute phase, extending out for a month or two, has been this really interesting issue of coagulation abnormalities, which have been responsible for both small-vessel and large-vessel arterial and venous occlusions. So this can be a really wicked virus in some people," says Dr Poland.

"We're really seeing a number of reports of people who report long-term fatigue, headaches, vertigo (and), interestingly enough, difficulties with cognition, hair loss, cardiac issues, and diminished cardiorespiratory fitness. And I think what we're going to find out is that a large portion of that is likely to relate to the significant cellular-level damage that this virus can cause," says Dr Poland.
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)