



To : Students and Staff Members
From : Prof AO Ayo-Yusuf
Acting Vice Chancellor
Subject : **Statement on COVID-19 for the SMU community**
Date : 7 March 2020

Dear Students and Staff Members

COVID-19 is a virus that causes flu-like symptoms. It has been identified mainly in China and has resulted in the deaths of over three thousand people world-wide from over a hundred thousand people infected. We should therefore not under estimate the impact of an infectious disease like the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The death of one person from any preventable infection is one death too many. It is now reported that South Africa has officially diagnosed seven recent travellers from Italy with COVID-19. There have been no cases of infection on SA soil. The department of health is actively pursuing the prevention of the spread of the disease by actively seeking out the contacts of these cases, taking measures to protect the community, treating the primary case of the infection, and channelling resources to the right places to prevent further spread. As the community of SMU we need to be aware of what is going on in the country and play our role in making sure that we do not contribute to the spread of the infection.

First on the list is that we should not contribute to the spread of fake news about COVID-19. The most reliable sources of information are the National Department of Health (<http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/gf-tb-program/465-corona-virus-outbreak>) and National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) web sites (<http://www.nicd.ac.za/symptoms-of-the-coronavirus/>). Should anyone need any additional information these two sites will be of great help. A resource person has also been identified in our Department of Virology for further information. Other sources have the potential of causing panic and unfounded fear about the possibility of acquiring the infection. Please be warned and not be sucked into the electronic media stories.

Secondly, you are all encouraged to maintain basic rules of infection control for diseases that are spread by droplet infections like that caused by the corona virus. Coughing and sneezing are common symptoms of the common cold and not necessarily imply COVID-19 infection. It is getting chilly these days. Should anyone have flu symptoms, please take the first step by isolating yourself (i.e. avoid infecting other people by sneezing in their faces etc.) as much as possible; this includes coughing into your elbow; avoiding shaking hands where there is a possibility of contamination; not touching your face (rubbing your itchy nose or touching your eyes); taking time off class to visit the Campus health clinic to report your

symptoms and getting treatment with bedrest; washing your hands regularly etc. If your roommate has flu, allow for ventilation and air circulation.

Thirdly, should you not get better in the next 48 hours or feel that you are actually getting worse, phone to alert a health personal directly or through the residence manager of your situation/symptoms before reporting at the Campus Health or doctor's rooms for further care. Being tolerant and being of assistant to each other during this period will go a long way to mitigating the social and psychological impact of the effect of COVID-19 in our community.

For our academic staff and others who plan to travel, we urge you to observe geographic risk assessment levels for COVID-19 transmission in deciding if to postpone or cancel your travel plans. Using the US Center for Disease Control (CDC)'s risk assessment, it is recommended that travellers avoid all travels to the certain countries and we would therefore not be approving any work-related travels to the following countries until further notice:

China
Iran
South Korea
Italy
Japan

However, for all other countries who have reported cases of COVID-19, if you really have to travel, we urge you to practice usual precautions to limit being infected, including practicing social distancing (stay 6 feet or 2 meters away from others) while actively monitoring your health.

Lastly, we would soon be installing hand sanitisers at entrances to large lecture halls, lifts, residences and other public areas on campus. We would also like to request that lecturers try to make lecture notes and presentations available on the blackboard so that those who might be in isolation can still access lecture notes remotely. We wish to reiterate that the National Department of Health guidelines are sufficient and fundamental to containing this infection. Fear and uncertainty caused by some of the stories shared contribute to feelings of helplessness. We therefore plan to soon publish an outbreak response protocol and organise another campus-wide lecture that will give some information on COVID-19 prevention and containment to staff and students.

We can act decisively and positively to prevent exposure and spread of this infection in our community.

Thank you for your understanding and contributions.

Kind regards,



**PROF AO AYO-YUSUF
VICE CHANCELLOR (ACTING)**