

Responding to COVID-19: Highlights of a Survey in SOUTH AFRICA

Summary

- Almost all South Africans know about COVID-19 and basic understanding about transmission and the importance of regular hand washing is high. However, a sizeable minority seek more information, which may help address some misconceptions on avoidance and ‘cures.’
- Most South Africans are positive about the government’s response to date and trust the information it provides on it.
- South Africans see the virus as both a high personal risk and a threat to their country. They are supportive of a wide range of personal and public health social measures (PHSMs) to help limit the spread of the coronavirus at this comparatively early stage of its spread in South Africa.
- Such interventions may be difficult to comply as many do not have separate rooms at home to isolate those who may become infected. Effective risk management and relief measures are essential to ensure the successful implementation of public health measures.
- TV, followed by radio, social media and WhatsApp are the key information sources the public relies on.

Background

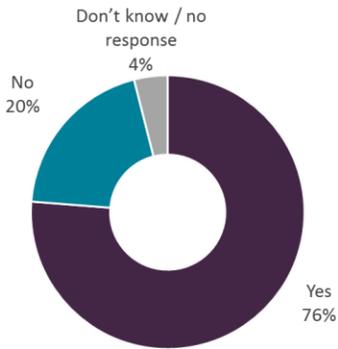
Public health social measures (PHSMs) are an important strategy to delay and reduce the magnitude of COVID-19. PHSMs, particularly those that restrict movement or entail the closure of services, can place a significant burden on populations. The effective implementation of PHSMs will require public support and compliance. Hence, this survey was conducted to assess public support for, and the likely social impacts of PHSMs in South Africa.

Key Findings of the Survey

Awareness of COVID-19 is high - but a sizeable minority seek more information and there is considerable misunderstanding on prevention and ‘cures’

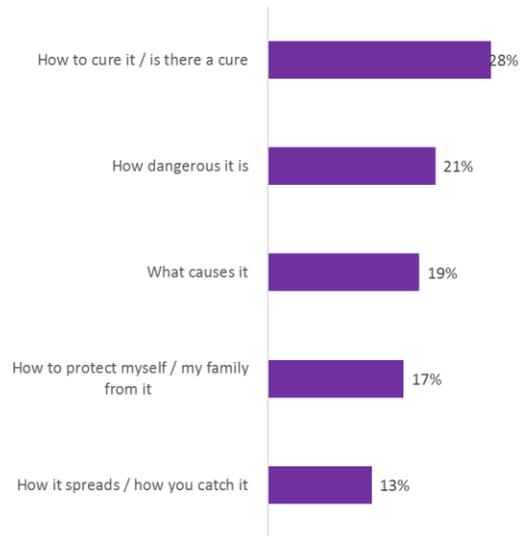
- Everyone has heard of COVID-19 (100%). Most spontaneously associate the symptoms with a fever (77%), followed by dry cough (67%), difficulty breathing, shortness of breath (65%) or flu/cold like sickness (53%). One in five (20%) South Africans – those from Durban in particular – feel they do not have enough information about it.
- South Africans would welcome more information on ‘how to cure it/is there a cure’ (28%); ‘how dangerous it is’ (21%), ‘what causes it’ (19%) and ‘how to protect myself/my family from it’ (17%).
- The majority believes that COVID-19 can be prevented by drinking lemon and vitamin C (70%) or that hot climate prevents the spread of the virus (61%). One in three thinks it can be cured with garlic (34%) and one in four believe that Africans can’t get it (24%). Fewer than one in 10 think that drinking bleach cures it (7%).

Q10. Do you feel you currently have enough information about the coronavirus/Covid-19 situation?



% who feel they have enough information	
Gender:	
Male	75
Female	78
Age:	
18-25 years	73
26-35 years	75
36-45 years	80
46-55 years	78
56 and older	78
Monthly Household Income:	
\$0-100	64
\$101-200	79
\$201-500	76
\$501+	82

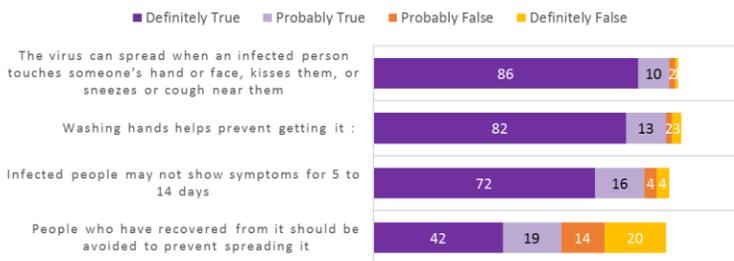
Q11. What are the two things about it that you would like most to have more information about? [Top five mentions]



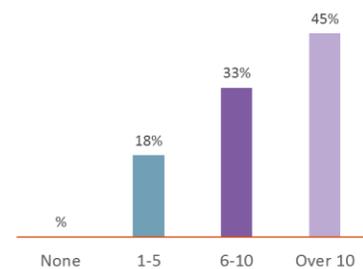
Nevertheless, the basic understanding of close contact transmission and the importance of hand-washing stands high

- Almost all think COVID-19 can be spread by touch, kiss, sneeze, or cough (96%, including 86% thinking this is 'definitely true') and that washing hands helps prevent getting it (95% including 82% 'definitely true'). Three in five (61%) think people who have recovered from it should be avoided due to risk spreading the virus.
- Just under half stated they washed their hands or used hand sanitizer over 10 times in the day prior to their interview compared with one in five washing 5 times or fewer (45% vs. 18%). Those with lower income tend to wash their hands less often.

Q14. I'm going to read things people have said about coronavirus or Covid-19. Please tell me if you think each is definitely true, probably true, probably false, or definitely false. (%)



Q40. Yesterday, how many times did you wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer?

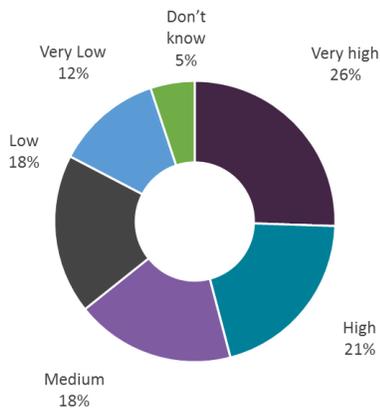


Q14. Share who agree definitely/probably true (%)	Gender		Age					Monthly Household Income			
	Male	Female	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	56 and over	\$0-100	\$101-200	\$201-500	\$501+
The virus can spread when an infected person touches someone's hand or face, kisses them, or sneezes or cough near them	95	96	97	95	95	95	95	90	94	94	98
Washing hands helps prevent getting it	94	95	95	94	96	93	95	97	92	94	95
Infected people may not show symptoms for 5 to 14 days	86	89	85	87	87	92	87	80	88	86	94
People who have recovered from it should be avoided to prevent spreading it	65	58	61	63	57	62	63	63	70	58	52

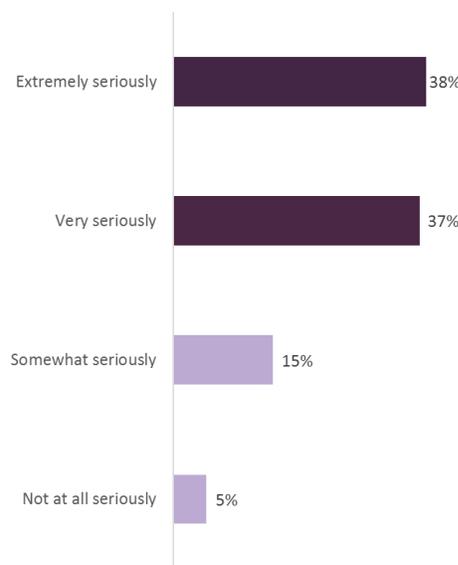
93% of South Africans believe that COVID-19 poses a big problem for the country: 46% see themselves at high risk for catching COVID-19.

- Almost all South Africans think that the coronavirus will be a problem for their country (93%, including 65% thinking it will become ‘a big problem’).
- Almost half feel they are at high risk of catching it (46% including 25% ‘very high’ risk) while a third believes they are at a low risk (31% low, including 12% ‘very low’).
- Almost four times as many believe that infection would seriously affect their health (76% ‘extremely/very seriously’) compared to those who think the impact would not be so serious (20% ‘somewhat/not very seriously’).
- The most commonly cited rationale for understanding the perceived effect on health is ‘it could kill me/make me very sick’ (57%), followed by ‘it seems serious’ (36%), ‘it caused a lot of problems abroad’ (26%) and ‘it can require hospitalization’ (24%).
- South Africans are optimistic about receiving help they would need to deal with the illness if they become infected – with four times as many confident about being able to get immediate help as to those not confident (78% vs. 17%). Those with lowest income tend to be less confident about getting immediate help should they need it.

Q5. Please indicate what you think your level of risk of catching coronavirus or Covid-19 is?



Q6. If you were infected by coronavirus or Covid-19, how seriously do you think it would affect your health?



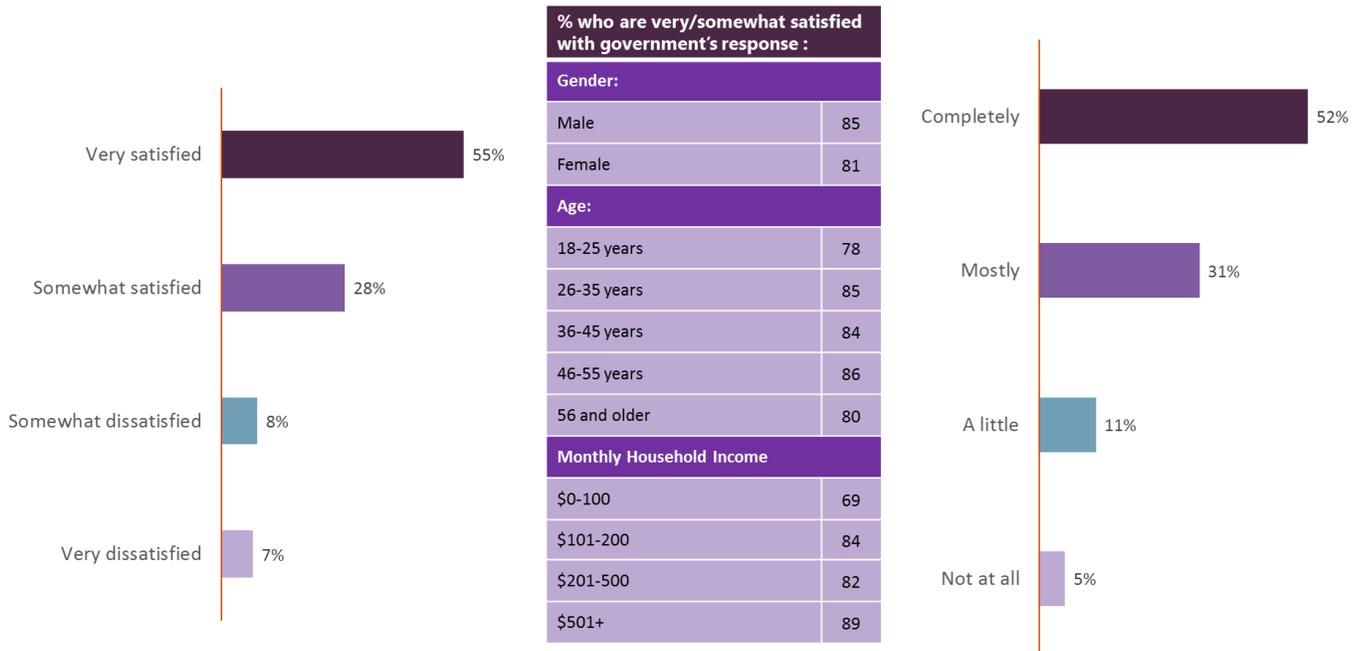
% who think coronavirus would affect their health extremely seriously/very seriously:	
Gender:	
Male	76
Female	75
Age:	
18-25 years	76
26-35 years	76
36-45 years	77
46-55 years	72
56 and older	79
Monthly Household Income:	
\$0-100	74
\$101-200	83
\$201-500	74
\$501+	70

South Africans’ perceptions of the governmental response to COVID-19 is broadly positive

- The majority are satisfied with their government’s response (83% vs. 16% dissatisfied). Those with lower household incomes tend to be less positive.
- South Africans are also more likely than not to trust the information provided by the government (83% including 52% ‘completely trust’ vs. 16% including 5% ‘not at all’). In line with the satisfaction with their government’s response, those with lower income are more likely to be suspicious about the information from their government.

Q12. How satisfied are you with the government's response to coronavirus or Covid-19?

Q13. How much do you trust information from the government about the coronavirus or Covid-19?



Support for public health social measures (PHSMs) runs high

- Almost all support requiring those with COVID-19 to remain home until they are well (97%); requiring those who have contact with infected people to self-isolate (96%); and stopping handshake/kiss greetings (95%).

South Africans also support restricting public gatherings

- Support is almost universal for restricting public gatherings to help limit a COVID-19 outbreak by stopping music concerts (97%); sports fixtures (96%); and prayer gatherings (88%). The majority say that stopping prayer gatherings would be made easier by TV/internet (51%) or radio broadcast (43%).

Most South Africans also support other temporary 'community PHSMs' to help slow the COVID-19 outbreak

- This includes closing restaurants/nightclubs (95%); churches and mosques (85%); and markets (76% - with older South Africans more likely to show support).
- More than seven in 10 would support closing a city off for two weeks (80%); closing transport between cities (78%); and closing transport in and around cities (73%). Those from Durban are less likely to be in favor of these measures.
- Nine in 10 (93%) would support school closures. Of those with children, three in four say they would have someone to look after them.

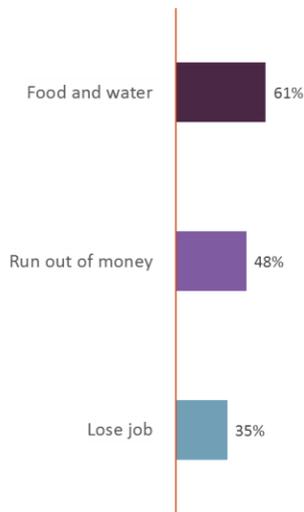
Level of support for Public health social measures (PHSMs) by type of intervention



PHSMs may place a significant burden on many South Africans

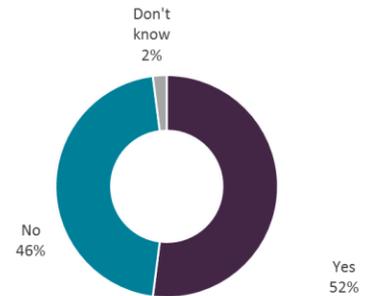
- Three times as many work outside the home as in it to earn money (37% vs. 13%). Three in 10 of those who work outside their home doubt that their workplace could accommodate staggered shifts (31%). Those with lower income are more likely to have such doubts.
- One in two have a separate room to isolate someone who becomes sick (52%).
- Asked about the biggest problems posed by staying at home for two weeks, most spontaneously talk about access to food and water (61%). Half talk of running out of money (48%), while one in three say losing their job (35%).
- If asked to stay at home, on median average, South Africans would need to get money after 7 days and food after 10 days. Men tend to estimate that they would run out of food sooner than women.

Q17: What would be the biggest problems for people like you to stay at home for 14 days?



Share who think the following would be the biggest problem... (%)	Food and water	Running out of money	Losing your job
Gender:			
Male	61	50	35
Female	61	45	35
Age:			
18-25 years	59	52	29
26-35 years	65	47	41
36-45 years	62	46	33
46-55 years	57	47	42
56 and older	57	47	25
Monthly Household Income:			
\$0-100	71	63	30
\$101-200	68	48	33
\$201-500	56	50	39
\$501+	50	36	30

Q38. Would you have a separate room in your home to keep someone isolated if they are sick?



TV is the main source of information relied on

- Most South Africans say they normally get their information on what’s happening in the country from local TV (69%); followed by radio (29%), international TV channel (27%) and social media (17%). TV is also the main source of information for local news (57%), supplemented by radio (33%), WhatsApp (19%) and social media (17%).

Technical Note

The fieldwork on this study was conducted by Ipsos with results based on 1,099 interviews with adults aged 18+ in Johannesburg (463 interviews), Pretoria (331 interviews) and Durban (305 interviews). Fieldwork was administered by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) using a Random Digit Dial (RDD) approach incorporating both landline and mobile sample. Data are representative of the populations of the urban area (s) included and are unweighted. Fieldwork took place between April 2 and April 6, 2020.

This program of research is an outcome of a partnership between Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, Africa CDC, the World Health Organization’s African Regional Office (AFRO) and Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO), and the World Economic Forum to form a new public-private partnership to support evidence-based implementation of PHSMs to reduce COVID-19 transmission in African countries (“flattening the curve”) while working with governments to mitigate social and economic disruption and other unintended consequences.