



Managing the Behaviour of People who Disregard COVID-19 Safety Preventive Measures

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The novel coronavirus pandemic remains a threat to the global healthcare system due to its rapid propagation (1). With the route of transmission similar to the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and the Severe acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), people easily get infected through direct contact and/or droplet infections. It is estimated that a patient with COVID-19 may infect 2.2 people (2) and the number of infections doubles every 6.4 days on average (3). One remarkable feature of the pandemic is its “super spreading” potential. Super spreading is the phenomenon where there is heightened transmission of the virus to at least eight contacts and this has been previously seen in outbreaks, such as SARS, MERS and Influenza (4). Infected individuals exhibit severe pneumonia, sepsis, respiratory distress, organ failure and even death (5). Prevention is the key approach in controlling, treating and defeating the COVID-19 pandemic (6). The World Health Organization has outlined various preventive measures, which include frequent handwashing with soap and warm water, hand sanitizing in the absence of handwashing, wearing facemask and physical distance but only a third of Americans are complying with it (7).

On average, people touch their face up to 2000 times per day (8). It is recommended that individuals avoid touching the mouth, nose or eyes to prevent the spread of the virus to at risk areas of the body. Also, individuals must avoid crowded locations or gatherings like parties, funerals and amusement parks to reduce the risk of transmission.

It is established that the likelihood of contagion and spread does not only depend on inherent infectivity nature of the virus (9) but also local contextual variables, such as hygiene practices, infection control standards and avoidance of crowding just as the case for MERS and SARS (10). Therefore, it is necessary to identify factors that may affect the spreading rate of the pandemic including non-compliance with preventive measures among the general population and how they can be managed. This helps to control the propagation of the COVID-19 infection and also plays critical role in our ability to respond to the pandemic. Non-compliance to safety measure can be considered a cause of failure for controlling the pandemic leading to inadequate response, increased risk of infection and recurrent infections. Despite all the Public Education Campaigns concerning COVID-19, some individuals may develop the habit of non-compliance. This behavior becomes challenging, especially when the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and related deaths are increasing each day.

Public Health Authorities and Institutions concerned may choose to go easy on these behaviors regardless of the adherence of people. However, the lack of compliance must be managed so that people will be obliged to adopt these preventive measures.

To discourage such behaviors, awareness campaigns should be intensified than before to dispel misconceptions, conspiracy theories and anti-lockdown groups while promoting medical guidelines, precautionary measures and health recommendations. People need to be sensitized on the dangers of the pandemic, its reality, seriousness and ways to combat the deadly contagious diseases. In short, we all have to take the dangers of the virus and act accordingly. Handwashing, masking up, physical distance and avoidance of overcrowding need to be persistently encouraged without relenting on these efforts. At the same time, responding to the demands of protectives supplies and making them available at vantage points is relevant. Addressing shortage of facemask and supplying them at free or low cost can handle some of these behaviors.

Mask producers should keep their products affordable and the COVID-19 outbreak should not be a reason to increase selling price (11). Relying on cutting down transmission by avoiding contacts and physical distance may not be sufficient (12) and people need to be convinced on the importance of masking up. In a related review, the probability of acquiring the infection when wearing mask was 3% compared to 17% without a mask (13). Also, people require access to basic handwashing facilities with soap and water. Therefore, the practice of con-

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tinuously distributing handwashing facilities in public place, such as community centers, schools, bus terminals and the market is highly encouraged.

There may be people who, with all the above-mentioned provisions, will still not observe preventive protocols. In our opinion, such people should be restricted from accessing public facilities or essential services unless they compulsorily comply with COVID-19 protocols. It is prudent that essentials services like financial institutions, food supplies, shopping centers and healthcare settings will mandate people to observe COVID-19 protocols before rendering any service to their clients. This should not be viewed as an infringement on personal right or liberty but rather protecting the vulnerability of the general population against the deadly virus. Celebrities and role models also have the responsibility of heading the advice of Centre for Disease Control and the World Health Organization to wear a face mask, wash hands and practice physical distance when in public. When celebrities are pro-active and taking precautions to stay safe, it inspires dozens of people and implores their followers to protect themselves (14). Many celebrities have been spotted on physical distance walks and wearing a mask with likes of Duchess of Cambridge, Bella Hadid, Jennifer Lawrence and Hailey Bieber having shown such examples (15). Some countries have seen success in these measures while others operate a more open society.

In the event that these interventions are not fully tackling the behavior, individuals who are found flouting safety protocols must be fined and made to pay some substantial amount of money or face the law. These fines have to be issued quickly to anyone seen not wearing a face mask or physically distancing in open public spaces and doubled in the cases of further offenses. The revenues realized from these fines can be used to support COVID-19 treatment, purchase protective gear for healthcare workers and even further subsidize the prices of masks or make them free. People who refuse to pay the fine within a limited number of days must be prosecuted in court. This approach sends a message to the general public about the severity of the problem and creates good manners as well as values for people to practice. Lastly, we recommend that security agencies (Police) tackle and enforce the breaches surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Police taking a gentle but firm stance on the issue to get people to fall in line will complement the above mentioned efforts. They should be lenient on people who cannot put on face covering or observe guidelines due to physical illness, impairment and medical reasons, accept reasonable excuses for non-compliance and engage offenders in community clean-up campaigns.

In Ghana, a country in West Africa, policemen are always patrolling the streets and checking public transports to ensure that both passengers and drivers are masked up and physical distance is observed. Some Ghanaians also frown at non-compliance behaviors, such as not practicing hand hygiene, not wearing a face mask and touching sensitive part of the body with the hands.

The behavior of people who break COVID-19 health guidelines can be retrained, modified or modelled. According to research conducted on disaster preparedness by the John Hopkin Centre for Health Security, people change behaviors if three conditions

are put in place, knowing the right thing to do, the reasons for doing it and seeing others doing it. This requires politeness, knowledge sharing and positive modeling and should be reflected in the activities of Public Health Campaigns and the lives of celebrities discussed earlier. However, there are others who may not respect guidelines, think the pandemic is not real or feel it is within their right not to observe these measures. In handling such behavior we should not be obnoxious because everyone is concerned, stressed out and fearful about the health challenges the pandemic has brought. One of the best easiest ways everyone can contribute to this pandemic is protecting yourself and others by observing safety protocols. The pandemic is deadly; not following guidelines is dangerous and it is not only you, it is me also. As we suggested, if these interventions fail, then enforcement approaches using security agencies can be employed.

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