

# Research suggests simple handwashing can drastically reduce coronavirus spread



**LONDON:** Researchers claim that if simple handwashing is done by travellers then the spread of the coronavirus can decrease by 24 – 69%, reported the UK-based Metro News.

The research “Hand-hygiene mitigation strategies against global disease spreading through the air transportation network”, claims that if hand-washing practices are followed at ten key airports then there would be a huge decrease in the spread of viruses.

According to the British paper, the ten airports ‘are not just locations that see large volumes of passengers, they also connect travelers with destinations in all parts of the world’.

Metro News reported that the authors have claimed that if these ‘mitigation strategies’ are implemented in ten key locations, the pandemic risk can drop by up to 37%.

“Airports, and airplanes, are highly infectious because they are close, confined areas with large, mobile populations,” said Christos Nicolaides of the University of Cyprus and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

According to the British paper such public need to be cleaned regularly and asked travellers should wash their hands and ensure that face masks and follow good coughing etiquette while jetting off to another place.

The research suggests that coughing in elbow or tissues can be considered as good coughing etiquette.

The researchers said that if hand cleanliness at all airports increased from 20% to 30%, the disease would have a global impact that is 24% smaller.

Deadly virus: Death toll from coronavirus jumped dramatically in China’s Hubei province on Thursday under a new method for diagnosing cases, as health experts warned the epidemic could get worse before it gets better.

Health officials in Hubei province said 242 people had died from the flu-like virus on Wednesday, the fastest rise in the daily count since the pathogen was identified in December, and bringing the total number of deaths in the province to 1,310. The previous record rise in the toll was 103 on February 10.

Hundreds of infections have been reported in more than two dozen other countries and territories, but only two people have died from the virus outside mainland China — one in Hong Kong and another in the Philippines. —Agencies

## Egypt confirms first coronavirus case in Africa



**CAIRO:** Egypt’s health ministry announced the first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus in Africa. The sufferer was not Egyptian, the ministry said in a statement, without specifying the nationality. “The ministry has taken preventative measures and is monitoring the patient... who is stable,” said health ministry spokesman Khaled Megahed. Egyptian authorities had notified the World Health Organization and the patient been placed in quarantined isolation in hospital. The death toll from the epidemic virus has neared 1,400 cases, almost exclusively in China where it was first identified. Deep trade links with China and often overstretched healthcare systems have raised concerns about the capacity of African countries to respond to an outbreak. Earlier this month, Egypt suspended all flights on its national carrier to China. They will remain grounded until the end of the month. Three hundred and one Egyptians were evacuated from Wuhan, epicentre of the virus in China, and have remained in quarantine for 14 days. —Reuters

## Exposure to mobile phone radio waves does not cause cancer

**NEW YORK:** After reviewing 11 years of published, scientific studies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has concluded there is no evidence that suggests exposure to radio waves from mobile phones causes tumors or cancer. “The available epidemiological and cancer incidence data continues to support the agency’s determination that there are no quantifiable adverse health effects in humans caused by exposures at or under the current cell-phone exposure limits,” reads a report by the US agency. The report rejects fears that radio waves from mobile phones pose health risks for human beings, saying that there was “no consistent pattern” in the studies that showed the waves contributed to tumors or cancer. However, the FDA does not offer a 100% conclusion but urges researchers to carry on their work. It called on researchers to include live animals and human beings in its experiments and include subsets of the human population, many of whom may be predisposed to tumor risk. Fears that the global expansion of next generation or 5G network have caused alarm bells to ring across the world. A village in Wohlen, Switzerland, has banned wireless antennas for fear of the radio waves. The tensions have risen because proposed 5G networks require more cell sites than 4G networks and sites need to be closer to users, for example on light posts and sides of buildings. —AFP

# Forget dinner dates. Exercising with your partner leads to a stronger relation-

**VANCOUVER:** Want to spice up your relationship for Valentine’s Day? Or maybe even start a new one off on the right foot? Go on an exercise date.

Exercise has a lot of health benefits and can also result in better connection and attraction among people. Those who exercise report higher satisfaction in their relationships. And this is even stronger for people who exercise with their partners.

Compared to non-exercisers, married people who exercise reported more positive marital events and fewer negative ones.

**IT’S ALL ABOUT THE HORMONES:** When you exercise, your body releases hormones such as endocannabinoids and endorphins. Endocannabinoids work on the reward areas of the brain – the same system affected by marijuana – and improve mood. Endorphins are your body’s natural opioids. The feel-good hormones that block out pain. As a result of these hormones, people feel happier after exercise, even after a single session. The effect of exercise is long-lasting and is associated with more positive social engagement, even into the next day. This may be because happier people smile more and smiling people are viewed as more attractive.

Adrenaline is also released as a result of exercise. It raises your heart rate, speeds up your breathing and increases your blood pressure. These are all similar responses to being sexually aroused. A classic study that purposely created situations to increase adrenaline release and anxiety found a relationship between anxiety and sexual arousal. This is termed misattribution of arousal, in which arousal of any sort, such as from anxiety or exercise, can be misinterpreted as sexual arousal by the body.

Indeed, following a 15-minute exercise session, adults reported greater attraction to pictures of the opposite sex compared to those who didn’t exercise, with the attraction increasing based on perceived indicators of exercise intensity.

Exercise also improves your confidence and self-image, which can make you more attractive to others. Our confidence, or self-efficacy (belief in our own abilities), tends to be tied to how much exercise we do. When it comes to self-esteem and body image (our satisfaction with your own body), these too are greater in people who exercise, and the more frequently they exercise, the greater the self-esteem.

**INCREASED ATTRACTION:** The benefits may also be greater when you exercise with your partner. Some of this may



be the result of spending time together and sharing an enjoyable experience. However, couples who completed novel and arousing (or exciting) activities together reported increased relationship quality compared to completion of a more mundane task, suggesting it’s not just the time together that matters. This is consistent with findings that exercising with another person is more fun compared to exercising alone. But you don’t need to know the person for exercise to have this effect. Exercising with a stranger can also result in attraction to one another. This was tested in an experiment of cross-sex partners randomly assigned to perform a physical task either at a low or high intensity. After completion of the task, participants answered questions regarding their attractiveness to their study partner.

Those participants who performed the task at the higher intensity reported greater attraction for their study partners.

The attraction can be further enhanced when exercising in activities that require similar movements such as dancing or walking in synchronicity. In lab experiments, people who mimicked the movements of their partner felt stronger emotional connection and greater bonding to one another. A later study found that the addition of physical exertion amplified these feelings. Compared to a group of people walking randomly, the group marching synchronously felt more connection and cooperation with one another. In another group that was marching at a faster pace, these feelings increased even more.

Exercise is also a form of play. There is

no better example of this than watching kids play. Play for them consists of running around, climbing and jumping, very similar activities to most types of exercise.

In many instances, such as sports, play is directly inherent in the activity. This social play provides its own reward by releasing endorphins. The effects of exercising with a partner can also be better for you as well. In addition to being more fun, workouts with others tend to last longer than workouts alone, which can give you an added health boost. Exercising with a partner, friends or a team adds accountability to your routine, as indicated in a study of married couples. Those couples who joined a gym together reported more workouts at the gym and fewer dropouts over one year compared to married individuals joining on their own. In a way, the effects of exercising together are almost self-fulfilling. It provides accountability, strengthens your relationship and provides more fun, making it more likely that you’ll keep exercising and continue the cycle. Scott Lear is a professor of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. This article first appeared on The Conversation. —CNA



# Why in a cheap food paradise, some Singaporeans are still going hungry



**SINGAPORE:** Rice, hot water and salt to taste. Shanger Panmerchelvam remembers a time when these were the only ingredients his family could afford for dinner. He was only 12 years old.

His mother had to stop work as a cleaner at a condominium when artery disease affected her legs. One year later, his father fell into clinical depression and left his fast-food job. Just like that, the family had no breadwinner.

Like most adolescent boys, Shanger had a burgeoning appetite – which a small bowl of porridge was unable to satisfy. “I was full of anger as I ate. I’d think to myself, why must I eat this?” he recalled. After dinner, he’d go to sleep. “There was nothing I could do about it. I slept so that I wouldn’t feel any emotions.”

That was his only meal of the day. In the morning, he’d go to school with an empty stomach, fighting hunger pangs through recess because he’d given his S\$1 school meal voucher to his 8-year-old brother.

“He had his own coupon but it wasn’t enough. He was always hungry also,” said Shanger, now 22. The family of four was given help with the bills, and food rations. But the latter wasn’t enough. The brothers resorted to begging for money from strangers after school.

“We’d give the ‘poor thing’ face, say our Ez-link cards had no money and we couldn’t get home,” said Shanger.



“We would ask for a dollar each for transport. Then we’d use this to buy a plate of chicken rice to share.”

## HUNGER IN A FOOD SECURE NATION

The rest of the time, it’s instant noodles for the cleaning supervisor, who has been unable to work for a year due to growing weakness in his limbs that doctors suspect might be Parkinson’s disease. While he waits for his ComCare assistance to be renewed, his kitchen cabinet is filled with packets of Maggi, cereal and Milo. “If I feel my stomach full, okay already. No choice,” he said. “I eat this to survive.” In a food paradise like Singapore, where cheap eats abound around almost every street corner, why are instant noodles a staple and emblem of resignation for some?

What makes putting food on the table a struggle for them, in a nation ranked No 1 on The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Global Food Security Index in December 2019?

**A1 food insecurity 38:** Some 4.1 per cent of Singaporeans faced moderate to severe food insecurity between 2016 and 2018, according to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 report by the United Nations.

The report took into account both survey responses and country-level data such as food consumption and availability. (By comparison, the figure was 5.4 per cent for South Korea, 8.1 per



cent for Indonesia and 13.4 per cent for Australia.) Locally, a study conducted by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation at the Singapore Management University (SMU) surveyed 236 Singaporeans in four low-income neighbourhoods being served by food support groups. It found that nearly 1 in 5 participants in these areas reported severe food insecurity in 2018.

“It was surprising because in a country like Singapore, where the stereotype is that there is no hunger, we were expecting to find just a handful of people,” said SMU associate professor of political science John Donaldson, while stressing that the findings didn’t represent Singapore as a whole.

Would you want to live on instant noodles everyday, for months? asks Azhar Ibad, 55. To be severely food insecure means being in the shoes of someone like Shanger – not knowing where your next meal is coming from, having to skip one, or even go an entire day without eating. But more generally, food insecurity refers to cases like Azhar’s: The lack of access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, due to financial or physical constraints.

Yet, 27 per cent of participants in the Lien centre survey had household incomes of S\$2,000 or more. (Eligibility for ComCare assistance cuts off at S\$1,900 household income or S\$650 per capita income.)

**A1 food insecurity 37:** Nor is Singapore



short of safety nets for those in need: From Government schemes such as ComCare and the Silver Support Scheme, to the efforts of a plethora of social service agencies, charities, religious organisations, grassroots groups, and community do-gooders.

So why, then, do some fall through the cracks? And who are they? As CNA Insider discovered – after tracking vulnerable families and individuals over months, and speaking to researchers and assistance groups – those who experience food insecurity are a surprisingly diverse group: One that can’t be defined by housing type, family size, age, or income group alone.

**BEYOND THE ELDERLY POOR:** The elderly poor often spring first to mind as an at-risk group – and not just for the lack of savings or income. Particularly for those who live alone, sickness, limited mobility and frailty pose a mammoth challenge to the simple act of cooking for themselves. “Some, because of physical or mental health, aren’t able to go downstairs and get food, even if it’s just a short distance from home,” said Sam Ngeow, centre manager of TOUCH Home Care.

Fion Phua, the founder of volunteer group Keeping Hope Alive, recalls in June last year finding a famished 79-year-old man lying on the floor of his one-room flat in Marsiling, too weak to move. The man – a former security guard who



had not been working since April after being injured in a fall – had not eaten in three days, she said. “We had to send him to the hospital.”

But, the elderly poor are also high on the list of vulnerable groups that receive attention. Not only has the Pioneer Generation package made a “real and important difference” in recent years, say many observers, the elderly are also the target of numerous social service agencies, volunteers and NGOs. The resulting irony is, such seniors can end up over-served by multiple well-meaning groups. Indeed, most the elderly poor whom CNA Insider encountered in various neighbourhoods were receiving food rations or free meals. The flip side of this, however, is that other food insecure groups whose needs may not be so plain to see, or so simple to ascertain, find themselves falling under the radar.

**‘HIDDEN’ FIGURES:** A stay-at-home mother of five, Fay\* found herself going on Facebook to look for donors offering milk powder or food. She had asked various organisations for help, only to be told: You’re not staying in a rental flat. The 36-year-old and her husband had bought a four-room HDB flat, and after they moved in in April last year, she said, the floors started to crack and there were leaks everywhere – an unsafe situation for her children, aged two to 18. To pay for the renovations, her husband, a technician, borrowed “a few thousand dollars” from licensed money lenders, a debt they are