IPK Head of Virology Department Sonia Resik issued a statement to CubaSí

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21/04/2020



SARS-CoV-2 is a highly contagious virus. It is spreading rapidly as 80% of people infected are asymptomatic. This situation is similar to other respiratory viruses, which makes this group the one with highest spreading risk, according to Dr. Sonia Resik, Head of Virology Department at the Pedro Kourí Tropical Medicine Institute (IPK).

The detection of asymptomatic carriers could lead to a huge contagious threat to population. Hence, we must insist on individual responsibility and risk perception as well as the mission of adults to caring for children and senior citizens.

To determine the presence of COVID-19, the IPK — national headquarter of reference in the study and treatment of infectious diseases — is proud of its skilled personnel and state-of-the-art equipment. To the diagnostic work, the departments of bacteriology, parasitology and vector control have joined forces with the department of virology. All of them have the capacity to do molecular biology work.

The working groups (consisting of 12-15 health professionals each), in the words of the specialist, are organized in four on-call duties. They work for 24 hours straight and then rest for 72 hours. That is why they work hard. We are a pretty big group with a profound commitment to our work and we barely take some rest. Workers on duty are working around the clock and they just rest half an hour during lunchtime and after diner.

At times, daily diagnosis could be limited by the number of equipments, but not by the human side of our personnel. Yet, with the number of equipments we have, we were able to carry out over one thousand tests last week. Those with certain knowledge on molecular biology know how hard is to do all those tests in just 24 hours.

While we are concerned about the increased lethality of the disease worldwide, it is paramount that people go to the doctor as soon as possible to the emergence of the first respiratory symptoms, which prevents Covid-19 complications and even death of patients, Resik highlighted.

However, the doctor warned about vulnerable population, especially those suffering from pathologies with associated risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, bronchial asthma, and the chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. This group of people is the one at increased risk of severe complications related to viral pneumonia with a respiratory distress, which may lead to death. But she stressed again the importance of going to the hospital in time.

In the wake of this epidemiological crisis, the specialist suggested, as top government officials have done several times, to avoid crowded places and unnecessary outings, wash our hands repeatedly and wear face masks to avoid contagiousness.

She also stressed “this is no time to be out there in the streets, but to stay at home quietly. We must select one individual per family, the healthiest family member, to go out and get some food. This person must be protected and keep social distancing. Once at home, chloride solutions must be applied to the shoes’ sole. And he/she must also wash his/her clothes, and take a shower.”

Dr. Sonia Resik believes that despite learning about Covid-19 along the

way, it is likely that this virus behaves similar to other respiratory viruses such as A (H1N1), first causing a pandemic wave and then remaining endemic in certain places, leading to occasional cases in non-immune individuals.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff