YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

1. QUESTION:

Should we be concerned about fecal-oral transmission? In addition to the risk from aerosolized fecal matter as described during SARS, it seems reasonable to be concerned about fecal/oral transmission by infected food workers. Is it also valid to be concerned about transmission by contaminated swimming pool water?

ANSWER:

Faecal-oral transmission may be possible. Some of the exported cases have had diarrhea as part of their illness. The Centre for Health Protection, out of an abundance of caution, and because of the Amoy Garden episode you allude to during SARS in 2003, recommends that you regularly pour water through your drainpipes, and that you close the toilet seat before flushing. However, the main protection against this kind of transmission is hand-washing.

Food workers should wash their hands well, as many other disease are also spread by the faecal-oral route.

In swimming pools, chlorination would be expected to eliminate coronavirus contamination, if it existed.

2. QUESTION:

Is there any evidence that people of Chinese ethnicity are more susceptible to severe Coronavirus infections?

ANSWER:

We do not know the answer to that question. I did reach out to colleagues in Toronto, who treated patients there during the 2003 SARS outbreak; however they did not keep ethnicity data on their patients and do not know the answer to that question.

MERS, another coronavirus that can cause severe disease in humans, has occurred primarily in the Arabian peninsula, where most patients are Arab, not Chinese.

It's an interesting question but one without an answer. Unfortunately, this conjecture has fueled some of the more extreme conspiracy theories,

3. QUESTION:

Did Tencent accidentally leak information showing vastly higher rates of infection and death from novel Coronavirus?

ANSWER:

No, that's fake news!

4. QUESTION:

Will the epidemic die out when the weather gets warmer?

ANSWER:

There's been considerable speculation about this but we don't yet know the answer to this question. It is known that many Coronaviruses don't like sunlight, high temperatures and humidity. That may have helped to stamp SARS out in May and June of 2003; however that remains conjecture. A great many control measures were put in place that probably were more important.

Influenza is another virus which is thought to die out when temperatures get warmer. But in Hong Kong, there are two peak seasons for Influenza: one in February/March, and one in July, when it is very hot. So the picture isn't entirely clear and the relationship between environmental conditions and viral transmission is complicated.

In any case, we do hope that the massive control measures in place will control the epidemic before then.