



## Malaysian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology

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### Alert on COVID-19

The MSGH Committee would like to alert its members on certain information with regards to COVID-19.

Almost half of the patients from the Chinese cohort did not complain of fever<sup>1</sup>, although cough, fever, fatigue and sore throat remain the most common symptoms. The frequency of gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms including nausea and diarrhoea vary from 5-50%<sup>2,3</sup>. Viral ribonucleic acid (RNA) may be present in GI secretions and have been isolated in stool samples. Leukocyte counts may also be low, and lymphopenia is commonly present. Between 20 to 30% of patients may have abnormal liver enzymes. Owing to its ability to spread during prodromal phase and in certain subjects who do not manifest any symptoms, the disease has a high transmissibility, having an RO of 2-2.5 (i.e. an infected individual may pass on the disease to two or three persons). The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets or when in close contact with one another<sup>4,5</sup>.

In view of the above clinical characteristics of COVID-19, the Society urges its members to:

- 1) Reduce or postpone non-urgent endoscopy cases. This will reduce:
  - a. strain on hospital resources
  - b. in-hospital patient traffic flow (i.e. to avoid over-crowding).
  - c. unnecessary exposure of staff to asymptomatic COVID-19 patients.
- 2) Apply full personal protection equipment (PPE) when performing cases with COVID-19 positivity or patients with high risk of COVID-19, ideally in a negatively pressured room.
- 3) Practise a high standard of personal hygiene by:
  - a. wearing a surgical mask
  - b. frequent hand washing with soap or use hand sanitizer
  - c. practising social distancing, and
  - d. avoiding crowded places.

We would like to emphasise the following:

- 1) GI symptoms may be the presenting symptoms
- 2) Delay all procedures unless it is urgent.

### MSGH Committee

#### References

Gaun W et al, Clinical Characteristics of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in China. N Engl J Med. 2020 Feb 28. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa2002032

<sup>2</sup> Huang C et al, Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China. Lancet 2020;395:497-506

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldendo.org/2020/02/05/weo-alert-wuhan-proposal-for-safety-in-digestive-endoscopy/>

<sup>4</sup> Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) 16-24 February 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>

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