



THE NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC: CONTAINMENT IS POSSIBLE

The outbreak of the respiratory disease, COVID-19, as announced by China in December 2019 has since put the world on edge. With the diagnosis and announcement of a case in Lagos (a traveler from Italy) on the 26th of February, the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease is now a reality in Nigeria. The quick diagnosis of the imported case in Nigeria, and the subsequent response by the government institutions responsible for dealing with such matters have been very commendable.

In pursuit of her mission to help solve national problems through the instrumentality of science, The Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS) wishes to state the following:

1. **The numbers tell a story**– From available World Health Organization (WHO) data, most cases and attendant deaths due to the COVID-19 disease have been in China (80,955 confirmed cases and 3,162 deaths by the 11th of March 2020). With a fatality rate of under 4% (in China with the highest number of cases), and given that that was the first country with an outbreak of an unknown disease, it can be deduced that the disease spreads readily but is not as fatal as it is infectious. Outside of China, by the same date, there have been a total of 37, 371 confirmed cases and 1,130 deaths giving a fatality rate of about 3%.

2. **Known control measures are effective** –With the strict control measures that have been instituted in China, the number of new cases outside China now exceeds those within that nation. Some countries, e.g. Nepal and Sri Lanka, with imported cases of COVID-19, have not reported any new case, for over 4 weeks. These tell us that it is possible to arrest the spread of the disease if the right steps are taken. The known measures already in place, viz. regular and proper washing of hands, screening at the ports of entry, quarantine/isolation, contact tracing, public enlightenment, use of personal protective equipment, and equipping and training of health workers are effective in containing the spread of the virus – these should be strengthened in Nigeria.

3. **Guard against panic** – With outbreaks of new, or relatively unknown diseases, it is important to guard against the spread of rumours and scientifically unfounded stories, including those of cures and of preventive measures. Some of these include the claim that chloroquine is a drug of choice for treating COVID-19, and the use of alcoholic drinks to wash hands to prevent the infection.

Recommended effective measures are the regular washing of hands with soap and water (the use of sanitizers being only an alternative where this is not readily available) and keeping a safe distance from someone coughing or sneezing (face masks are more effectively used by the person who is sick and not the healthy). With the spread of the

disease to 113 countries, it is imperative that screening at our ports of entry must be stringent and more comprehensive.

4. **Trust the authorities** – While commending the government on the steps taken so far to contain the spread of the disease to and within Nigeria, the Academy urges transparency, strengthening of evidence-informed containment measures, and the need to engage local experts in ensuring that Nigeria is spared the socio-economic disruption that an uncontrolled outbreak could unleash on our nation. The Academy would also like the general public to know that the containment of COVID-19 will require the cooperation of everyone with the government authorities at all levels (Federal, State, and LGAs). Individuals have a most important role to play by complying with official guidelines and directives put in place by the government to control the disease. Such cooperation will facilitate effective surveillance, as well as early detection and treatment of cases.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'K. Mosto Onuoha', is positioned above the typed name.

Professor K. Mosto Onuoha FAS

President

12th, March 2020