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## **Illovo Sugar Africa Repurposes Its Medical Facilities to Combat COVID-19 Outbreak**

*...On World Health Day pan-African agri-business steps up to join fight against coronavirus pandemic...*

7 April 2020 - Illovo Sugar Africa is responding to the COVID-19 outbreak by reconfiguring its medical infrastructure to deal directly with any potential COVID-19 infection within its own business, or the surrounding communities. Commemorating World Health Day on April 7<sup>th</sup>, the leading sugar producer in Africa announced how it has converted its existing medical infrastructure to zero-in on combating the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Illovo's interventions against COVID-19 have been primarily focused on the countries in which they have operations. Dr Ernest Peresu, Illovo's Group Medical Specialist, says *"Over the years, Illovo has invested heavily in its medical infrastructure and staff in order to be able to respond to the medical needs of our people across all our markets, as well as those – as much as is feasible - of the communities that host our operations. With the advent of COVID-19, our hospitals and clinics have reconfigured and streamlined their activities in order to nimbly react to the outbreak of what has become an evolving challenge – whilst at the same time, still offering the same services that our doctors, sisters and nurses have delivered to our people up to now."*

The company has divided its medical services into two streams with a single-entry point for all people coming into their clinics and hospitals. People are pre-screened by way of a simple questionnaire in their own language and their body temperature is taken. *"Should we have reason to believe the person may be infected, or is presenting with indicated respiratory symptoms, he or she is immediately masked and directed to a designated and isolated consultation room. We ensure that all social distancing protocols are observed to keep our other patients, who are attending for regular medical treatment, protected,"* Dr Peresu continued.

### **Mask etiquette**

In addition to the reconfiguration, Dr Peresu has also tackled an issue of growing public confusion, the question around wearing a protective mask.

Dr Peresu's reiterates that, *"The World Health Organization (WHO) does not recommend that people who are well and healthy wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. The WHO is very clear on this matter; face masks should only be worn by sick people experiencing respiratory symptoms such as coughing and sneezing, those caring for people suspected to have COVID-19, and healthcare workers working in a healthcare facility attending to patients with COVID-19 infections."*

Dr Peresu also notes that the COVID-19 virus has been detected in the respiratory droplets of COVID-19 patients one to two days before they have developed symptoms. Because COVID-19 appears to be easily spread by infected people not yet showing symptoms, it is possible that masks might help prevent people - who are not yet aware that they are infected - from spreading it to others.



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Therefore, the primary logic of wearing a mask should be to control the spread of infection at source by restricting the spread of respiratory droplets to other people. Dr Peresu is concerned about the misinformation circulating about mask wearing and believes that there are two important issues to be addressed in the interests of public safety:

- 1) The **wearing of masks by generally healthy people in public does not protect them** from other people who may be infected. People wear face masks to protect others from themselves.
- 2) **Homemade masks** (e.g. those made from bandanas, scarves etc) **do not protect people** from acquiring COVID-19. Homemade masks are not considered PPE (personal protective equipment), since the properties of the materials used are unknown. The moisture retention, reuse of homemade masks and poor filtration may actually result in increased risk of infection.

For more information on how you can protect yourself, your family and your community from contracting COVID-19, please visit <https://www.illovosugarafrica.com/UserContent/documents/Announcements/CoronaVirus-Presentation-Group-new.pdf>

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**Notes to editor:**

If you would like a **picture of Dr Ernest Peresu**, Illovo's Group Medical Specialist or to speak with Illovo Sugar Africa for more information, please contact:

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