Episode #8 - Myth vs Science

16 October 2020 | Science conversation

WHO's Science in 5 on COVID-19 - Mythbusters

Summary

Dr Sylvie Brand busts some myths related to COVID-19 and antibiotics, alcohol and garlic in thi episode of Science in 5.

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Transcript

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Welcome to Science in 5, I'm Vismita Gupta-Smith and this is WHO's conversations in science. We're busting some more myths today with Dr Sylvie Briand. Dr Briand is the Director of the Department of Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness. Dr Briand's team in WHO tracks several dangerous and infectious pathogens around the globe, including COVID-19. Welcome, Sylvie.

Dr Sylvie Briand:

Hello. Thank you.

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Sylvie, we're talking about some of these myths that we have sourced from Google's most searched questions. Some of them, we have seen resurfacing on various social media again and again. This one actually comes up very often. Let's start with the one where, in social media posts, we see that Italian studies have found that COVID-19 is actually not caused by a virus, that it's caused by a bacteria and that by using antibiotics, it can be cured. What is the science behind that?

Dr Sylvie Briand:

COVID-19 disease is caused by a virus and this has been proven many times. The virus has been isolated by many laboratories in the world and we even have the genetic sequence data of the virus. So, it's not a bacteria and using antibiotics to treat COVID-19 will not help because it's a virus and not a bacteria. But what we have seen in some hospitalized patients is that they were given antibiotics, not to treat COVID-19 but to prevent superinfection by other bacteria because some people are really fragile and we fear that, on top of COVID-19, they can get also another bacterial infection.

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Sylvie, we also hear this question very often about alcohol and COVID-19. If you have COVID-19 and you consume a lot of alcohol, it will sanitize you, it will disinfect you and kill the virus. Science or myth?

Dr Sylvie Briand:

No, in fact, drinking alcohol doesn't cure or doesn't prevent COVID-19 infection. The virus is

not sensitive to the alcohol we drink. But maybe people are confused because they see that we use hydroalcoholic gel to wash our hands but in reality, the alcohol that is in the hydroalcoholic gel is much more concentrated. And this is certainly not something you can drink, otherwise it will have serious side effects.

So, it's only to wash your hands, not for drinking.

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Sylvie, we also hear a lot about garlic. If you consume garlic, it protects you from COVID-19. Is there science behind it?

Dr Sylvie Briand:

Regarding COVID-19, so far we have no evidence that garlic is a treatment for this disease. So some studies are studying it but again, I mean, we need to really cross check the different studies, before making any recommendation about garlic. What is for sure is that it's not good for health to abuse garlic and to take too much garlic expecting that garlic will cure the disease. I think it's important for people and I understand that people can be very stressed and very anxious about this disease but there are other ways to reduce anxiety and there are other things people can do to be better protected, like washing hands, wearing a mask in crowded places, maintaining physical distancing.

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Can you explain to us how scientists look at these myths and how do they verify these myths?

Dr Sylvie Briand:

Yes, sure. The issue with the scientific process is that it's a long process because at the beginning you have a hypothesis and you wonder "maybe this product or this drug can work and be a treatment for this new disease”. But then you have to implement studies in different places to check if really it works or not. And so, this is the scientific process that, at the end, enables you to have evidence. But it takes time. You need to test the hypothesis on many, many people before you can get definitive results. So, until all the studies are done, we cannot say there is evidence. And currently with COVID-19, it was a new disease only a few months ago, so studies are ongoing. But as I said, it takes time. So, some studies are finished and they get results. So, the results are really interesting, but before having a conclusion or a definitive answer, we need to see what are the results of the other studies and make sure that all the studies conclude to the same thing.

Vismita Gupta-Smith:

Thank you, Sylvie. That was Dr Sylvie Briand busting some myths about COVID-19. If you see some misinformation or have some questions, please go to WHO's Mythbusters section on our website where we often address some of these myths. Until next time then. Stay safe, stay healthy and stick with science.

Speaker key

Vismita Vismita Gupta-Smith

Sylvie Dr Sylvie Briand