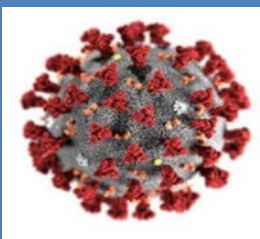




Issue Brief:

Spices can boost overall immunity but no evidence supporting they can specifically fight COVID-19



Prepared by: Knowledge Translation and Food and Nutrition Science Directorate, EPHI (20th April 2020)

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major global health crisis that is wreaking havoc in the world. Since SARS-COV2, the virus that causes COVID-19 is novel, there is no current cure for the disease. In Ethiopia, health claims that using spices such as garlic, garden cress (feto) and others can prevent infection and even treat COVID-19 are prevalent. These claims have led to confusion about the effectiveness of spices in the fight against COVID-19. This issue brief summarizes the findings of a review that looked at the scientific literature to examine if spices that are commonly used in Ethiopia can help fight COVID-19. The aim is to inform decisions at the governmental level and provide information to the general public.

Key findings:

- ⇒ There is no scientific evidence to support the claim that spices can prevent infection or cure COVID-19.
- ⇒ Some of the spices commonly used in Ethiopia, namely Turmeric/curcuma longa (“Ird”), Garlic (“Nech Shinkurt”), Ginger (“Zinjibil”), Mustard (“Senafich”), Ruta graveolens (“Tena Adam”), Chili (“Karia/ Mitmita”), and Cinnamon (“Kerefa”), have antiviral properties for some viruses that are not part of the coronavirus family.
- ⇒ Although there is no evidence to support use spices against COVID-19, commonly used spices contain bio-active compounds that give them antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory properties, and thus immune boosting effects.
- ⇒ However, if taken in large amounts some spices can cause toxicity. Ruta graveolens (“Tena Adam”), Lepidium Sativum (“Feto”), Cinnamomum zeylaicum (“Kerefa”), Trachyspermum Ammi (“Nech azmud”) can lead to adverse effects like toxicity, organ damage, and abortion in pregnant women if taken in a large dose.

Do spices prevent or treat COVID-19?

Currently there is no scientific evidence that shows positive effect of any spice or food item for prevention or cure of COVID-19. In general, eating a balanced diet is important to keep you healthy and boost your immune system. To reduce your risk of COVID-19 wash your hands regularly, cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and stay at home or avoid crowded places. For more information, call our toll free numbers 8335 or 952 or region specific toll free lines.

Priority Actions

Community mobilization:

- * Promote the consumption of a balanced diet with a variety of foods to enhance immunity and reduce the risk of infection
- * Consumption and preparation of spices should not change in response to COVID-19
- * The public should be informed to avoid excessive intake of spices that may cause toxicity and other health complications if used in large doses, especially in pregnant women and people taking medication for chronic disease

Conducting research:

- * Research institutes and Universities need to give attention to conducting research on the potential use of spices and other indigenous foods to fight COVID-19 infection

Evidence used in this issue brief can be found in narrative review conducted by: Belachew T and Sinaga M “Can Ethiopia’s Spicy Diet help Fight COVID-19 Infection?” a Narrative Review and WHO website.

Contact:
Food and Nutrition Science / Knowledge Translation Directorates, EPHI,
www.ephi.gov.et/0112756310