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### Infectious Disease Outbreak Resources

Included in this document you will find resources to help support Parents (see pages 2-6) and help you talk with students of all ages (see pages 7-10). We also want to remind adults to take care of their behavioral health needs (see pages 11-14) during this time. While this time can cause stress (see pages 15-18) for some, there are resources (see pages 19-23) available to assist.

For further information and resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>  
<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>



# Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

At this time, information about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving as new details are confirmed and new questions emerge. In the event of an outbreak in your community, as a parent/caregiver, your first concern is about how to protect and take care of your children and family. Knowing important information about the outbreak and learning how to be prepared can reduce your stress and help calm likely anxieties. This resource will help you think about how an infectious disease outbreak might affect your family—both physically and emotionally—and what you can do to help your family cope.

## What You Should Know

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. COVID-19 is caused by a novel coronavirus; this means it is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that is mainly spread person-to-person. Currently, there is no available vaccine or curative treatment, so the best preventative strategy is to avoid exposure.
- So far, children appear to be much less affected by COVID-19, which was also seen after other coronavirus outbreaks.
- Children with pre-existing illnesses may have different risk, so you should discuss this with your child's medical team.
- To reduce the spread of the virus, a variety of approaches will be used, including keeping those who are sick away from others and promoting healthy hygiene strategies. Additional recommendations for ways to contain the virus's spread could include canceling of events that attract large numbers of people; closing schools, public transit or businesses; and required quarantine, which is the separation and restriction of movement of people who might have been exposed to the virus.

## READINESS

### Preparing your Family for a Potential Infectious Disease Outbreak

Being prepared is one of the best ways to lessen the impact of an infectious disease outbreak like COVID-19 on your family. Here are some steps that you can take to be better prepared:

#### Information & Communication

- Identify how you will keep up with the rapidly changing information on COVID-19.  
In rapidly changing health events and outbreaks such as COVID-19, there can be large amounts of incorrect or partially correct information that can add to your stress and confusion as a parent/caregiver. Identify a few trusted sources of health information.

The NCTSN relied on the CDC resources to create this document.

Get the most up-to-date and accurate information at:

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC: information on children and COVID 2019:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>

<https://healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>

Plan how you want to discuss COVID-19 with your family. Be sure to include:

What the current disease outbreak is

How it is contracted

What are the possible dangers

Protective steps being taken in the community/nation/global community

Protective steps everyone in the family can take

- Hold your family discussion in a comfortable place and encourage family members to ask questions. Consider having a separate discussion with young children in order to use language they can understand and to address specific fears or misconceptions they may have.
- Create a list of community resources that will be helpful during an outbreak. Make sure you know their emergency telephone numbers, websites, and official social media accounts. These may include: your family's schools, doctors, public health authorities, social services, community mental health center, and crisis hotlines.
- Develop a plan for maintaining contact with friends and family members via telephone and internet in the event that isolation or quarantine is recommended.
- Check in with your children's school about potential homeschool and distance learning opportunities that may be offered during a school closure. Also, if your child receives additional services at school, ask how these will be handled during a closure (e.g., meals, therapeutic services).

### **Reducing Your Family's Risk: Hygiene, Medical Care & Supplies**

Have all family members practice preventive behaviors including:

- Regularly washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water (length of the A-B-C song) or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home when sick.
- Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or with the bend/crook of the arm when coughing or sneezing.

Keep basic health supplies on hand (e.g., soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and a thermometer).

Make sure you have a supply of medications taken regularly.

If your child takes medication for a chronic condition, talk with your child's medical provider about plans to get a supply at home that will last through any period of home isolation for your family.

Have your family work together to gather items that might be needed during an outbreak. These include drinking water, nonperishable food, and cash. Be sure to include activities, books, and games for children in case a lengthy time at home is recommended. Remember to include batteries in your item list if those are needed for certain activities and games.

**HAVE ALL YOUR  
FAMILY MEMBERS  
PRACTICE GOOD  
HYGIENE AND  
PREVENTIVE  
BEHAVIORS.**

### Coping with the Stress of an Infectious Disease Outbreak like COVID-19

Even if your family is prepared, an outbreak can be very stressful. To help your family cope with this stress, following these recommendations can help:

#### Information & Communication

- Keep updated about what is happening with the outbreak and additional recommendations by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities, and updates from public health websites (e.g., CDC).
- Seek support and continued connections from friends and family by talking to them on the telephone, texting, or communicating through email or social media. Schools may have additional ways to stay in contact with educators and classmates.
- Although you need to stay informed, minimize exposure to media outlets or social media that might promote fear or panic. Be particularly aware of (and limit) how much media coverage or social media time your children are exposed to about the outbreak.
- E-mail and texting may be the best ways to stay in contact with others during an outbreak, as the Internet may have the most sensational media coverage and may be spreading rumors. Check in regularly with your children about what they have viewed on the Internet and clarify any misinformation.
- Focus on supporting children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation.
  - Talk about their feelings and validate these
  - Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities
  - Clarify misinformation or misunderstandings about how the virus is spread and that not every respiratory disease is COVID-19
  - Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience
  - Check back in with your children on a regular basis or when the situation changes

**NOTE:** During an outbreak, stigma and rejection can occur against individuals who live in affected communities, against health-care workers, and individuals with other illnesses.

#### Scheduling & Activities

- Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
- Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (prayer, participating in services on the Internet).
- Have children participate in distance learning opportunities that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.
- Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.
- Help your family engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with your family and cultural values.

## Hygiene & Medical Care

- Find ways to encourage proper hygiene and health promoting behavior with your children (create drawings to remember family routines; sing a song for length needed to wash hands like the A-B-C or Happy Birthday song, twice). Include them in household jobs or activities so they feel a sense of accomplishment. Provide praise and encouragement for engaging in household jobs and good hygiene.
- Reassure your children that you will take them to the pediatrician and get medical care if needed. Explain, however, that not every cough or sneeze means that they or others have COVID-19.

## Self Care & Coping

- Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation and focus on what you can accomplish.
- Shift expectations and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment.  
  
Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation.
- Attempt to control self-defeating statements and replace them with more helpful thoughts. Here's a helpful checklist for identifying unhealthy thoughts and coping with them:  
<https://aramiliesfirst.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Cognitive-Distortions.pdf>.
- Remember, you are a role model for your children. How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.
- If your family has experienced a serious illness or the death of a loved one, find ways to support each other, including:

Reach out to your friends and family, talking to them about the death of your loved one. Use telephone, email, or social media to communicate if necessary.

Find ways to honor the death of your loved one. Some activities may be done as a family, while additional activities may be done individually.

Seek religious/spiritual help or professional counseling for support. This may be available online or by telephone during an outbreak.

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## HELPING CHILDREN COPE

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Your children may respond differently to an outbreak depending on their age. Below are some reactions according to age group and the best ways you can respond:

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
PRESCHOOL	Fear of being alone, bad dreams Speech difficulties Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting Change in appetite Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors	Patience and tolerance Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime Maintain regular family routines Avoid media exposure

<p><b>SCHOOL-AGE</b> (ages 6-12)</p>	<p>Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior</p> <p>Clinging, nightmares</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)</p> <p>Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest</p> <p>Competition for parents' attention</p> <p>Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</p> <p>Regular exercise and stretching</p> <p>Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</p> <p>Participate in structured household chores</p> <p>Set gentle but firm limits</p> <p>Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community</p> <p>Encourage expression through play and conversation</p> <p>Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</p>
<p><b>ADOLESCENT</b> (ages 13-18)</p>	<p>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</p> <p>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Isolating from peers and loved ones</p> <p>Concerns about stigma and injustices</p> <p>Avoiding/cutting school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Encourage continuation of routines</p> <p>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</p> <p>Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games</p> <p>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak</p>

**SEEKING ADDITIONAL HELP**

If you or a loved one is having a difficult time coping with the outbreak and want to seek outside help, there are ways to get that help. For example:

- Get support regarding your anxiety or stress by speaking to a trained counselor at SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUS 66746.
- Contact your physician or your insurance company (if they have a consultation line) to ask health-related questions or to seek mental health support.
- Learn more ways to help your family. Additional resources can be accessed at:
  - [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)
  - [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)
  - [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html)

*Last updated: March 1, 2020*



## Talking With Children:

### TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS DURING INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS

#### What You Should Know

When children and youth watch news on TV about an infectious disease outbreak, read about it in the news, or overhear others discussing it, they can feel scared, confused, or anxious—as much as adults. This is true even if they live far from where the outbreak is taking place and are at little to no actual risk of getting sick. Young people react to anxiety and stress differently than adults. Some may react right away; others may show signs that they are having a difficult time much later. As such, adults do not always know when a child needs help.

This tip sheet will help parents, caregivers, and teachers learn some common reactions, respond in a helpful way, and know when to seek support.

#### Possible Reactions to an Infectious Disease Outbreak

Many of the reactions noted below are normal when children and youth are handling stress. If any of these behaviors lasts for more than 2 to 4 weeks, or if they suddenly appear later on, then children may need more help coping. Information about where to find help is in the Helpful Resources section of this tip sheet.

#### PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, 0–5 YEARS OLD

Very young children may express anxiety and stress by going back to thumb sucking or wetting the bed at night. They may fear sickness, strangers, darkness, or monsters. It is fairly common for preschool children to become clingy with a parent, caregiver, or teacher or to want to stay in a place where they feel safe. They may express their understanding of the outbreak repeatedly in their play or tell exaggerated stories about it. Some children's eating and sleeping habits may change. They also may have aches and pains that cannot be explained. Other symptoms to watch for are aggressive or withdrawn behavior, hyperactivity, speech difficulties, and disobedience.

- **Infants and Toddlers, 0–2 years old**, cannot understand that something bad in the world is happening, but they know when their caregiver is upset. They may start to show the same emotions as their caregivers, or they may act differently, like crying for no reason or withdrawing from people and not playing with their toys.
- **Children, 3–5 years old**, may be able to understand the effects of an outbreak. If they are very upset by news of the outbreak, they may have trouble adjusting to change and loss. They may depend on the adults around them to help them feel better.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE, 6–19 YEARS OLD

Children and youth in this age range may have some of the same reactions to anxiety and stress linked to infectious disease outbreaks as younger children. Often younger children within this age range want much more attention from parents or caregivers. They may stop doing their schoolwork or chores at home. Some youth may feel helpless and guilty because they are in a part of the world currently unaffected by the outbreak, or where the public health system protects people against outbreaks in ways it cannot in other parts of the world.

- **Children, 6–10 years old,** may fear going to school and stop spending time with friends. They may have trouble paying attention and do poorly in school overall. Some may become aggressive for no clear reason. Or they may act younger than their age by asking to be fed or dressed by their parent or caregiver.
- **Youth and Adolescents, 11–19 years old,** go through a lot of physical and emotional changes because of their developmental stage. So it may be even harder for them to cope with the anxiety that may be associated with hearing and reading news of an infectious disease outbreak. Older teens may deny their reactions to themselves and their caregivers. They may respond with a routine “I’m okay” or even silence when they are upset. Or they may complain about physical aches or pains because they cannot identify what is really bothering them emotionally. They may also experience some physical symptoms because of anxiety about the outbreak. Some may start arguments at home and/or at school, resisting any structure or authority. They also may engage in risky behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs.

## How Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers Can Support Children in Managing Their Responses to Infectious Disease Outbreaks

With the right support from the adults around them, children and youth can manage their stress in response to infectious disease outbreaks and take steps to keep themselves emotionally and physically healthy. The most important ways to help are to make sure children feel connected, cared about, and loved.

- **Pay attention and be a good listener.** Parents, teachers, and other caregivers can help children express their emotions through conversation, writing, drawing, playing, and singing. Most children want to talk about things that make them anxious and cause them stress—so let them. Accept their feelings and tell them it is okay to feel sad, upset, or stressed. Crying is often a way to relieve stress and grief.



- **Allow them to ask questions.** Ask your teens what they know about the outbreak. What are they hearing in school or seeing on TV? Try to watch news coverage on TV or the Internet with them. Also, limit access so they have time away from reminders about the outbreak. Don’t let talking about the outbreak take over the family or classroom discussion for long periods of time.

- **Encourage positive activities.** Adults can help children and youth see the good that can come out of an outbreak. Heroic actions, families and friends who travel to assist with the response to the outbreak, and people who take steps to prevent the spread of all types of illness, such as hand washing, are examples. Children may better cope with an outbreak by helping others. They can write caring letters to those who have been sick or lost family members to illness; they can organize a drive to collect needed medical supplies to send to affected areas.
- **Model self-care, set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and take deep breaths to handle stress.** Adults can show children and youth how to take care of themselves. If you are in good physical and emotional health, you are more likely to be readily available to support the children you care about.



## Tips for Talking With Children and Youth of Different Age Groups During an Infectious Disease Outbreak

**A NOTE OF CAUTION!** *Be careful not to pressure children to talk about an outbreak or join in expressive activities. While most children will easily talk about the outbreak, some may become frightened. Some may even feel more anxiety and stress if they talk about it, listen to others talk about it, or look at artwork related to the outbreak. Allow children to remove themselves from these activities, and monitor them for signs of distress.*

### PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, 0–5 YEARS OLD

Give these very young children a lot of cuddling and verbal support.

- Get down to their eye level and speak in a calm, gentle voice using words they can understand.
- Tell them that you always care for them and will continue to take care of them so they feel safe.
- Keep normal routines, such as eating dinner together and having a consistent bedtime.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE, 6–19 YEARS OLD

Nurture children and youth in this age group:

- Ask your child or the children in your care what worries them and what might help them cope.
- Offer comfort with gentle words, a hug when appropriate, or just being present with them.
- Spend more time with the children than usual, even for a short while.
- If your child is very distressed, excuse him or her from chores for a day or two.
- Support children spending time with friends or having quiet time to write or create art.

## Helpful Resources

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane -- Rockville, MD 20857  
 Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)  
 Email: info@samhsa.hhs.gov  
 SAMHSA Store: https://store.samhsa.gov

### SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515 Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov  
 Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac

### Hotlines

#### SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)  
 (English and español)  
 SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746  
 SMS (español): "Hablamos" al 66746  
 TTY: 1-800-846-8517  
 Website (English):  
 https://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov  
 Website (español): https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol

#### SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and español)  
 Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

#### Child Welfare Information Gateway

Toll-Free: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) Website:  
 https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/reporting/how

### Treatment Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator  
 Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)(24/7 English and español);  
 TTY: 1-800-487-4889  
 https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov

### Resources Addressing Children's Needs

#### Administration for Children and Families

Website: https://www.acf.hhs.gov

### Additional Behavioral Health

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free (English): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
 Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454  
 TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)  
 Website (English): https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org  
 (español): https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol

#### National ChildTraumatic Stress Network

Website: https://www.nctsn.org

- Encourage children to participate in recreational activities so they can move around and play with others.
- Address your own anxiety and stress in a healthy way.
- Let children know that you care about them—spend time doing something special; make sure to check on them in a nonintrusive way.
- Maintain consistent routines, such as completing homework and playing games together.

## When Children, Youth and Parents, Caregivers, or Teachers Need More Help

In some instances, children may have trouble getting past their responses to an outbreak, particularly if a loved one is living or helping with the response in an area where many people are sick. Consider arranging for the child to talk with a mental health professional to help identify the areas of difficulty. If a child has lost a loved one, consider working with someone who knows how to support children who are grieving.<sup>1</sup> Find a caring professional in the Helpful Resources section of this tip sheet.

<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Children and Disasters. (2010). *National Commission on Children and Disasters: 2010 report to the President and Congress* (AHRQ Publication No. 10-MO37). Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Retrieved from <http://archive.ahrq.gov/prep/nccdreport/nccdreport.pdf> [PDF - 1.15 MB]

*\*Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*



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 (2014)



# Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health:

## TIPS FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING, QUARANTINE, AND ISOLATION DURING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAK

### What Is Social Distancing?

Social distancing is a way to keep people from interacting closely or frequently enough to spread an infectious disease. Schools and other gathering places such as movie theaters may close, and sports events and religious services may be cancelled.

### What Is Quarantine?

Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. It lasts long enough to ensure the person has not contracted an infectious disease.

### What Is Isolation?

Isolation prevents the spread of an infectious disease by separating people who are sick from those who are not. It lasts as long as the disease is contagious.

## Introduction

In the event of an infectious disease outbreak, local officials may require the public to take measures to limit and control the spread of the disease. This tip sheet provides information about **social distancing, quarantine, and isolation**. The government has the right to enforce federal and state laws related to public health if people

within the country get sick with highly contagious diseases that have the potential to develop into outbreaks or pandemics.

This tip sheet describes feelings and thoughts you may have during and after social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. It also suggests ways to care for your behavioral health during these experiences and provides resources for more help.

## What To Expect: Typical Reactions

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. People may feel:

- **Anxiety, worry, or fear** related to:
  - Your own health status
  - The health status of others whom you may have exposed to the disease
  - The resentment that your friends and family may feel if they need to go into quarantine as a result of contact with you
  - The experience of monitoring yourself, or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of the disease
  - Time taken off from work and the potential loss of income and job security
  - The challenges of securing things you need, such as groceries and personal care items

- **Concern** about being able to effectively care for children or others in your care
  - **Uncertainty or frustration** about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future
  - **Loneliness** associated with feeling cut off from the world and from loved ones
  - **Anger** if you think you were exposed to the disease because of others' negligence
  - **Boredom and frustration** because you may not be able to work or engage in regular day-to-day activities
  - **Uncertainty or ambivalence** about the situation
  - **A desire to use alcohol or drugs** to cope
  - **Symptoms of depression**, such as feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite, or sleeping too little or too much
  - **Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, such as intrusive distressing memories, flashbacks (reliving the event), nightmares, changes in thoughts and mood, and being easily startled
- Stay up to date on what is happening, while limiting your media exposure. Avoid watching or listening to news reports 24/7 since this tends to increase anxiety and worry. Remember that children are especially affected by what they hear and see on television.
  - Look to credible sources for information on the infectious disease outbreak (see page 3 for sources of reliable outbreak-related information).

## BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

Speaking out about your needs is particularly important if you are in quarantine, since you may not be in a hospital or other facility where your basic needs are met. Ensure you have what you need to feel safe, secure, and comfortable.

- Work with local, state, or national health officials to find out how you can arrange for groceries and toiletries to be delivered to your home as needed.
- Inform health care providers or health authorities of any needed medications and work with them to ensure that you continue to receive those medications.

If you or a loved one experience any of these reactions for 2 to 4 weeks or more, contact your health care provider or one of the resources at the end of this tip sheet.

## Ways To Support Yourself During Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation

### UNDERSTAND THE RISK

Consider the real risk of harm to yourself and others around you. The public perception of risk during a situation such as an infectious disease outbreak is often inaccurate. Media coverage may create the impression that people are in immediate danger when really the risk for infection may be very low. Take steps to get the facts:

### EDUCATE YOURSELF

Health care providers and health authorities should provide information on the disease, its diagnosis, and treatment.

- Do not be afraid to ask questions—clear communication with a health care provider may help reduce any distress associated with social distancing, quarantine, or isolation.
- Ask for written information when available.
- Ask a family member or friend to obtain information in the event that you are unable to secure this information on your own.

### WORK WITH YOUR EMPLOYER TO REDUCE FINANCIAL STRESS

If you're unable to work during this time, you may experience stress related to your job status or financial situation.

- Provide your employer with a clear explanation of why you are away from work.
- Contact the U.S. Department of Labor toll-free at 1-866-4USWAGE (1-866-487-9243) about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows U.S. employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for serious medical conditions, or to care for a family member with a serious medical condition.
- Contact your utility providers, cable and Internet provider, and other companies from whom you get monthly bills to explain your situation and request alternative bill payment arrangements as needed.
- If approved by health authorities and your health care providers, arrange for your friends and loved ones to bring you newspapers, movies, and books.
- Sign up for emergency alerts via text or email to ensure you get updates as soon as they are available.
- Call SAMHSA's free 24-hour Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990, if you feel lonely or need support.
- Use the Internet, radio, and television to keep up with local, national, and world events.
- If you need to connect with someone because of an ongoing alcohol or drug problem, consider calling your local Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous offices.

## Sources for Reliable Outbreak-Related Information

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027  
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

<http://www.cdc.gov>

### World Health Organization

Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization  
525 23rd Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-974-3000

<http://www.who.int/en>

## CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Reaching out to people you trust is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom during social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. You can:

- Use the telephone, email, text messaging, and social media to connect with friends, family, and others.
- Talk “face to face” with friends and loved ones using Skype or FaceTime.

## TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

If you are in a medical facility, you may have access to health care providers who can answer your questions. However, if you are quarantined at home, and you're worried about physical symptoms you or your loved ones may be experiencing, call your doctor or other health care provider:

- Ask your provider whether it would be possible to schedule remote appointments via Skype or FaceTime for mental health, substance use, or physical health needs.
- In the event that your doctor is unavailable and you are feeling stressed or are in crisis, call the hotline numbers listed at the end of this tip sheet for support.

## USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO COPE AND RELAX

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray, or engage in activities you enjoy.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do something fun after a hard task.

- Talk about your experiences and feelings to loved ones and friends, if you find it helpful.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking; consider keeping a journal where you write down things you are grateful for or that are going well.

## After Social Distancing, Quarantine, or Isolation

You may experience mixed emotions, including a sense of relief. If you were isolated because you had the illness, you may feel sadness or anger because friends and loved ones may have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious.

The best way to end this common fear is to learn about the disease and the actual risk to others. Sharing this information will often calm fears in others and allow you to reconnect with them.

If you or your loved ones experience symptoms of extreme stress—such as trouble sleeping, problems with eating too much or too little, inability to carry out routine daily activities, or using drugs or alcohol to cope—speak to a health care provider or call one of the hotlines listed to the right for a referral.

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If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or someone else, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

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## Helpful Resources

### Hotlines

#### SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English and español)

SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746

SMS (español): "Hablamos" al 66746

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

Website (English): <http://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

Website (español): <http://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov/espanol.aspx>

#### SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and español)

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free (English): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

Website (English): <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Website (español): <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/gethelp/spanish.aspx>

### Treatment Locator

#### Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Website: <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/home>

#### SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: [DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov)

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

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*\*Note: Inclusion or mention of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

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HHS Publication No. SMA-14-4894  
(2014)



# Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

## What You Should Know

When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease such as Ebola, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal, and may be more likely or pronounced in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease outbreak, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress, and know when to get help.

## Know the Signs of Stress

What follows are behavioral, physical, emotional, and cognitive responses that are all common signs of anxiety and stress. You may notice some of them after you learn about an infectious disease outbreak.

### YOUR BEHAVIOR:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol, tobacco use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

## Know When To Get Help

You may experience serious distress when you hear about an infectious disease outbreak, even if you are at little or no risk of getting sick. If you or someone you know shows signs of stress (see list at left) for several days or weeks, get help by accessing one of the resources at the end of this tip sheet. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline right away if you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill him- or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.



### YOUR BODY:

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

### YOUR EMOTIONS:

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling angry
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness

### YOUR THINKING:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Having difficulty making decisions

## Know How To Relieve Stress

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

### KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE:

Set limits on how much time you spend reading or watching news about the outbreak. You will want to stay up to date on news of the outbreak, particularly if you have loved ones in places where many people have gotten sick. But make sure to take time away from the news to focus on things in your life that are going well and that you can control.

### GET THE FACTS:

Find people and resources you can depend on for accurate health information. Learn from them about the outbreak and how you can protect yourself against illness, if you are at risk. You may turn to your family doctor, a state or local health department, U.S. government agencies, or an international organization. Check out the sidebar on the next page for links to good sources of information about infectious disease outbreaks.

### KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY:

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

### USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO RELAX:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.



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Take care of your physical health to help lower your stress. Take a break to focus on positive parts of your life, like connections with loved ones.

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### PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY, FEELINGS, AND SPIRIT:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event, and think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions, and behavior around past events.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you.
- Connect with others who may be experiencing stress about the outbreak. Talk about your feelings about the outbreak, share reliable health information, and enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak, to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your lives.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

### Sources for Credible Outbreak-Related Health Information

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027  
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)  
<https://www.cdc.gov>

#### World Health Organization

Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization  
525 23rd Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-974-3000  
<http://www.who.int/en>

## Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
(SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

Email: info@samhsa.hhs.gov

SAMHSA Store: https://store.samhsa.gov

### **SAMHSA Hotlines**

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Website in Spanish: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/  
disaster-distress-helpline/espanol

#### **SAMHSA's National Helpline**

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral  
Information Service in English and español)

Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-  
helpline

#### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454

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Website in English: https://

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol

### **Treatment Locator**

#### **Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator**

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### **SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center**

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov

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(2014)

# Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak

**6 March 2020**

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated there is a high risk of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreading to other countries around the world.

WHO and public health authorities around the world are taking action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, this time of crisis is generating stress in the population. These mental health considerations were developed by the Mental Health Department as support for mental and psychological well-being during COVID-19 outbreak.

## General population

1. COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. Don't attach it to any ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to those who got affected, in and from any country, those with the disease have not done anything wrong.
2. Don't - refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases", "victims" "COVID-19 families" or the "diseased". They are "people who have COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", "people who are recovering from COVID-19" and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.
3. Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. Gather information at regular intervals, from [WHO website](#) and local health authorities platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumors.
4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.

5. Find opportunities to amplify the voices, positive stories and positive images of local people who have experienced the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and have recovered or who have supported a loved one through recovery and are willing to share their experience.
6. Honor caretakers and healthcare workers supporting people affected with COVID-19 in your community. Acknowledge the role they play to save lives and keep your loved ones safe.

### Health care workers

7. For health workers, feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your health worker colleagues are likely going through; in fact, it is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. [Managing your stress](#) and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
8. Take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies- ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing. This is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using the strategies that you have used in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. The strategies to benefit feelings of stress are the same, even if the scenario is different.
9. Some workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support- your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.
10. Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. Forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information should be utilized if you are a team leader or manager in a health facility.

### Team leaders or managers in health facility

11. Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they will have a better capacity to fulfil their roles.
12. Ensure good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from high-stress to lower-stress functions. Partner inexperienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Ensure that outreach personnel enter the community in pairs. Initiate, encourage and monitor work breaks. Implement flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted or have a family member impacted by a stressful event.
13. If you are a team leader or manager in a health facility, facilitate access to, and ensure staff are aware of where they can access mental health and psychosocial support services. Managers and team leads are also facing similar stressors as their staff, and potentially additional pressure in the level of responsibility of their role. It is important that the above provisions and strategies are in place for both workers and managers, and that managers are able to role-model self-care strategies to mitigate stress.
14. Orient responders, including nurses, ambulance drivers, volunteers, case identifiers, teachers and community leaders and workers in quarantine sites, on how to provide basic emotional and practical support to affected people using [psychological first aid](#).

### For caretakers of children

15. Help children find positive ways to express disturbing feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his/her own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing, and drawing can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
16. Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe for the child, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. If a child needs to be separated from his/her primary caregiver, ensure that appropriate alternative care is and that a social worker, or equivalent, will regularly follow up on the child. Further, ensure that during periods of separation, regular contact with parents and caregivers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled phone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g., social media depending on the age of the child).

17. Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, especially if children are confined to home. Provide engaging age appropriate activities for children. As much as possible, encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family when advised to restrict social contact.
18. During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss the COVID-19 with your Children in honest and age-appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing those together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.

#### For caretakers of older adults

19. Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, and withdrawn during the outbreak/while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.
20. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way. and it may also be helpful for information to be displayed in writing or pictures. Engage their family and other support networks in providing information and helping them practice prevention measures (e.g. handwashing etc.)
21. Encourage older adults with expertise, experiences and strengths to volunteer in community efforts to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak (for example the well/healthy retired older population can provide peer support, neighbor checking, and childcare for medical personnel restricted in hospitals fighting against COVID-19.)

#### People in isolation

22. Stay connected and maintain your social networks. Even in situations of isolations, try as much as possible to keep your personal daily routines. If health authorities have recommended limiting your physical social contact to contain the outbreak, you can stay connected via e-mail, social media, video conference and telephone.

23. During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective. Public health agencies and experts in all countries are working on the outbreak to ensure the availability of the best care to those affected.
  
24. A near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day from health professionals and [WHO website](#) and avoid listening to or following rumors that make you feel uncomfortable.

**Stay informed:**

Find the latest information from WHO on where COVID-19 is spreading:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

Advice and guidance from WHO on COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.epi-win.com/>