

WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus. It is not the same as other types of coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, like the common cold. Those who are older than 60, have underlying health conditions such as heart or lung disease, and diabetes, are particularly at risk.

HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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

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.

- 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 being treated for COVID-19," "people recovering from COVID-19" and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.
- Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare and protect yourself and loved ones. 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 official websites and local health authorities platforms to help you distinguish facts from rumors.
- 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.

- Find opportunities to amplify the voices, positive stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19 and have recovered or who have supported a loved one through recovery and are willing to share their experience.
- 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.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS

For health workers, feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your 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.

- Take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies- ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient 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. Even so, using the strategies that you have used in the past to manage stress can benefit you now. The strategies are the same, even if the scenario is different.
- 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, stay connected with your loved ones including through digital methods. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted individuals for social support – your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.
- 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.

HEALTH FACILITY TEAM LEADERS OR MANAGERS

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.

- 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.
- Facilitate access to mental health and psychosocial support services and ensure staff are aware of where to access these resources. Managers and team leads are also facing similar stressors as 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.

- 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.

CARETAKERS OF CHILDREN

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 expressing of feelings. Children feel relieved through expressing and communicating their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
- If considered safe, keep children close to their parents and family 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 available 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).
- 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 contract.
- During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss COVID-19 with your children with honest and age-appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing those may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.

CARETAKERS OF OLDER ADULTS

Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline or 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.
- Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with and without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way. It may also be helpful for information to be displayed in writing or pictures.
- Engage family and other support networks in providing information and helping practice prevention measures (e.g. handwashing etc.)
- 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.)

INDIVIDUALS IN ISOLATION

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

- 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.
- 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 official sources. Avoid listening to or following rumors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

General questions from the public or healthcare provider inquiries about COVID-19 may be directed to the ISDH COVID-19 call center toll-free at 877-826-0011 (available 8 a.m. to midnight).

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available at the links below.

- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/>
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.in.gov>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>