

Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks



When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease such as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) you may feel anxious and show signs of stress. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, and worry. Signs of stress are normal, and may be more prone in people with loved ones directly affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease outbreak, monitor your own physical and emotional health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Knowing how to cope with stress, and when to get help, will make you and your community stronger.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Increased or decreased levels of energy or activity
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Things you can do to support yourself:

- **Get the facts.** Find resources you can depend on for up-to-date and accurate health information, i.e., your local health department or U.S. government agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- **Set limits.** Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- **Take care of your body.** Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- **Make time to unwind.** Try to do some other activities you enjoy. Read a book, watch your favorite TV show, or catch up on a podcast.
- **Connect with others.** Talk with loved ones via phone, FaceTime, or social media.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Remind yourself that everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Be kind to yourself and others.

Know when to get help

You may experience distress when you experience an infectious disease outbreak or undergo a quarantine. If you or someone you know shows signs of stress for several days or feels overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, get help.

Call **911** or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: **1-800-985-5990** or text TalkWithUs to **66746**. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Call us at 1-800-899-8174 or visit
OptimaEAP.com for more resources.

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