

# COVID-19: BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

With 24-hour news coverage of COVID-19 (“Coronavirus”) spread, rising death tolls, fluctuating stock markets, and declarations from top officials that the U.S. is unprepared to handle the pending global pandemic, it is not surprising that Americans are worried about the COVID-19. Fear, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder followed major infectious disease outbreaks earlier in this century, and behavioral health clinicians should be prepared for similar reactions to the current COVID-19 situation.

Although COVID-19 is a health issue that is being taken very seriously by public health authorities worldwide, there are a lot of unknowns, and uncertainty fuels anxiety and depression. Stress weakens the immune system, so the more you worry, paradoxically, the more you may be decreasing your ability to fight off the virus.

Thus far, the most severe cases of COVID-19 have occurred in medically compromised populations, which includes psychiatric patients, especially those with anxiety disorders or severe mental illness.



## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Plan Ahead
- Find Reliable Sources of Information
- Keep Things in Perspective
- Stay Self-Aware
- Stay Healthy
- Keep Connected
- Get Additional Support If Needed



There are many simple and effective ways to help manage your fears and anxieties. Many of them are essential ingredients for a healthy lifestyle; adopting them can help improve your overall emotional and physical well-being.

### Plan Ahead

Plan ahead to feel more in control and decrease anxiety. This includes having information and a roadmap if your office or schools close. Make sure you are prepared to work at home with tools and resources and discuss this option in advance with your employer. To prepare for cancellation of business travel, make sure you have the technology and tools to do virtual meetings.

### Find Reliable Sources of Information

There is a lot of information and some misinformation in the media. Stick with a reliable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization along with advisors or vendors that you know and trust.

### Keep Things in Perspective

Limit the time you spend watching or listening to media coverage. Although you'll want to keep informed, remember to take a break from watching the news and focus on the things that are positive in your life and things that you have control over.

### Stay Self-Aware

Be mindful of your assumptions about others. Someone who has a cough or a fever or someone who comes from a different country does not necessarily have COVID-19. Self-awareness is essential in not stigmatizing others.

### Stay Healthy

Exercise can decrease stress levels and boost our immune system. Eat well and prioritize sleep. Being tired and run down can weaken your resistance to viruses. Look for opportunities to reduce stress by using mindfulness and meditation apps and techniques.

### Keep Connected

Keep connected. Maintaining social networks can help preserve a sense of normalcy and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress.

### Get Additional Support If Needed

Get additional support from mental health services or professionals if you feel consistent or overwhelming worry or anxiety.

This is an especially stressful time for health care workers and emergency workers as they take care of those potentially infected with COVID-19. If you are in this group or have a friend or family member that is, encourage them to take proper steps to care for themselves, monitor for stress reaction, and seek professional help if needed.

## Keep up with COVID-19 with the following sites:

<https://www.cdc.gov/Coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

<https://www.businessgrouphealth.org/topics/blog/the-evolving-situation-of-coronavirus-what-we-know-and-what-we-dont>

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/Coronavirus>