Mental Wellness and Staying Calm During Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs

This guidance document will continue to be updated as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Visit www.coronavirusnetwork.org for the latest information, updates and resources.

What is the right level of worry I should have about coronavirus?

We are all seeing people who are in a panic and others who are dismissing coronavirus as no big deal. Neither hysteria nor disregard is a helpful level of worry, but a thoughtful and practical amount of concern is warranted.

Everyone should embrace a level of concern that allows them to make changes in their behavior that will slow the spread of the coronavirus. That means staying home, or sheltering in place, as much as possible (especially if you are not feeling well), washing your hands often, wearing a cloth facemask or covering out in public and helping educate others on the best ways to slow the spread of the disease. Identify who among your friends and family may be at high risk of getting severe cases of COVID-19 (i.e. those with underlying health conditions and those over the age of 65) and talk to them about their concerns and how you might be able to help them navigate the pandemic.

Generally, people are the safest, or have the lowest risk of getting the coronavirus, when they shelter in place at their home. You can help people at high-risk stay at home by dropping off groceries and needed supplies.

Is it okay to go outside if things are re-opening?

As businesses, restaurants and other places begin to re-open and people begin to go back to work, it is important to know that the coronavirus is still with us and will be for the foreseeable future. As a result, as places re-open and people go about their daily lives, we should all continue to be aware of the ongoing risk of getting and spreading the coronavirus. We know there are a number of things that are within our power to reduce the risk while going out in public, and that there are situations we can put ourselves in that range from low-risk to high risk.

People are safest when they stay at home without interacting with many people. When you leave your home, you can reduce risk by wearing a face mask and avoiding large crowds in closed spaces, where it is impossible to keep 6 feet of distance from others. For example, you are at fairly low risk if you decide to go for a run by yourself outside while wearing a mask. You are most at risk when you do not wear a mask and enter a closed space with lots of people who are also not wearing masks, like at a bar or restaurant, for example. Overall, since all of us need to go outside and participate in re-opening in one way or another, it should not be something
that causes you high anxiety, but you should be smart about it and understand the risks you take.

**How can I keep myself calm?**

Three sources of information on the coronavirus — mainstream media, politicians, and social media continue to give mixed messages about the coronavirus and COVID-19. This may create confusion and worry. To manage your anxiety, the most important thing to remember is that most healthy people that get COVID-19 experience only mild symptoms and recover from their illness within two weeks.

If you feel anxious, do the things that are within your control to keep yourself, your loved ones, and your community safe:

- Avoid non-essential, leisure-related travel and crowds when possible
- Maintain 6 feet of distance from others when in public
- Wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth when in public (especially when it is not possible to maintain 6 feet of distance from others)
- Frequently wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds (especially after being in public)
- Use appropriate hand sanitizers as a substitute for washing your hands when soap and water is not available
- Do not touch your face (especially with unwashed hands)
- Frequently disinfect ‘high-touch’ surfaces, like your desk, phone, tablet, smartphone, and countertops.
- Be able to prepare meals at home without having to shop for several days (shop so you can shelter in place at home for days at a time)

**What can someone do if they have a job that still requires them to go to work? What can I do if I am worried about going back to work?**

Those that are medical providers or have essential jobs that require them to go outside to work have an extremely stressful situation, for themselves and their family. There can be additional tension in working relationships and feelings of burnout even if there is not yet an overload at the workplace. Individuals with these critical jobs may experience fear or stigma when out in public. In extreme cases, for health workers experiencing a surge of COVID-19 cases there is worry of infection, implications for families and moral distress as resources get rationed. If you know someone who has a job that necessitates they must go out and work, send them words of encouragement and love.

Individuals who must go into work, or are planning on returning to work soon, should talk to their leadership about what precautions are being taken to make the workplace as safe as can be in terms of reducing the spread of the coronavirus. This includes the planned disinfecting of the
workplace on a regular basis, access to paid sick leave, having social distancing policies at
work, and access to personal protective equipment, such as gloves and face masks. In addition,
workers should also speak with their leadership and ask what plans and resources there are to
help workers manage stress and exhaustion. There should be clear, consistent and daily
communications about how the situation is evolving from leadership. Short debriefs are good
and all concerns should be heard.

Overall, a workplace culture where it is okay to say you are not okay and where breaks are
encouraged, both from work and while on the job, should be promoted. Workplaces can create
the ability for employees to talk with a licensed psychologist if possible, or make resources for
mental health needs available.

What if I'm worried I have the coronavirus. What should I do?

If you are feeling sick and have any COVID-19 symptoms you should seek out a test to confirm
whether or not you have the coronavirus. Though testing availability differs from place to place,
most states are making sure that anyone who wants a test can get one. To find out where you
can be tested, call your doctor or check the website of your local or state department of health.
To learn more about testing, please see the COVID-19 Testing FAQ resource. Other than going
to get tested, if you are feeling sick you should assume you have the coronavirus and isolate
yourself from others and avoid all contact.

If contact cannot be avoided, you should wear a face mask that covers your mouth and nose.
All of these measures are essential to preventing the spread of the virus and protecting your
loved ones and community. If your test results come back positive and you have COVID-19, you
should continue to isolate yourself. To learn how to effectively isolate yourself and for how long,

Most cases of COVID-19 lead to mild illness that lasts 10 to 14 days. Mild cases can be taken
care of from home without seeking medical care or seeing a doctor. If you are sick, you should
make sure you get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids. While isolating yourself, you should also
closely keep track of your symptoms to see if they get worse over time. If you develop any
severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain, or new confusion, or are
otherwise worried about your health, you should call your doctor or seek emergency medical
care.

How can I keep mentally well if I'm stuck home all day?

The first thing to do is to develop an action plan to adapt to the new reality of social distancing
and having to stay at home. That means a need to rethink your daily habits with a focus on
things you do have control over. Think about what positive opportunities staying home might
provide you.
Do these things more

- Connect with friends and loved ones through video chats, phone calls, texting, and email. You can set-up virtual happy hours and meals with friends and family to feel connected even at a distance.
- Find ways to create new healthy routines at home, including what you eat and and physical exercise
- Pick up an old hobby or start a new one

Don’t do these things:

- Use alcohol or other drugs to cope with stress and anxiety
- Watch news and read articles all day long. Decide on credible sources that you can check in the morning and again briefly at the end of the day. Trying to stay tuned in in 24/7 can actually make your anxiety worse
- Scroll endlessly looking through social media

What can I say to people who are worried and anxious?

It is important to use empathy. People are right to be worried, so do not dismiss their anxiety, even if they seem emotional. Ask them what they are most concerned about. Remind them that most people only experience mild symptoms if they catch the coronavirus. Provide them with the above suggestions and point them to other information (such as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQ and the Debunking 20 Myths about Coronavirus documents). Project calm to the individual and remind them that with the proper precaution and preparation, they will be able to navigate the coronavirus pandemic in a way that will keep them and others safe.

How do I deal with someone (friends, and family) who is spreading misinformation about coronavirus?

The coronavirus pandemic has heightened political divisions within society and has added to a growing distrust of science for many. As a result, there is a lot of misinformation about the coronavirus and COVID-19 circulating from government officials, news agencies, and on social media. When someone close to you is spreading misinformation that you think may be hurtful, it can cause feelings of discomfort, disappointment and anger.

Although it may be difficult, one thing you can do in this situation is reach out to this person and try to speak with them one-on-one. Empathy and understanding are important. Try to figure out why they believe what they believe and where they get their sources. Instead of telling them that they are simply wrong, try pointing them to more authentic and authoritative sources, such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). In many cases, you will not be able to change their mind about what they believe, but at least you are letting them know how their actions make you feel.
Information for this document came from:
US Center for Disease Control (CDC): https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus
The World Health Organization (WHO): https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus
Dr Julie Highfield, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Cardiff Critical Care
Dr. John Sharp Harvard Medical School and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.
Nina Bai, Web Writer University of California San Francisco
David Cennimo MD, Assistant Professor at Rutgers
Shane Owens, Ph.D., ABPP is a board-certified behavioral and cognitive psychologist

This FAQ was written by the Coronavirus Support Network, a project of Sostento Inc. a US based 501c3 federally recognized nonprofit. To join the network visit
www.coronavirusnetwork.org.

Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.