

# Patient Guide to Managing Stress During the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak

Information about COVID-19 continues to change as new details about the virus emerge. If there is an outbreak in your community, you may be concerned with how to best take care of yourself and family members. Knowing up-to-date information about the outbreak and how to be prepared can reduce stress and decrease worry. This handout will help you think about how the COVID-19 outbreak might impact you and your family members both physically and emotionally and what you can do to help you and loved ones cope.

## Tips for managing social distancing and isolation

Understand that it is okay to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and worried about what may happen. With flexibility and creativity—there are actions that we can take to help feel more prepared and reduce our stress during times of uncertainty, while minimizing our risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

### Stay connected

- Develop a plan for maintaining contact. While individuals are asked to physically distance themselves from others, make a plan to connect via video chat, text, or phone. Scheduling times to connect with your friends and family can also be helpful and can be another way to reduce stress. Being open to sharing how you feel about this situation with others can help reduce stress.
- If you feel overwhelmed or distressed, reach out for counseling and support within your community - to local counselors, to specialists from The University of Kansas Hospital using telebehavioral health services provided by your primary care clinic, to community mental health clinics and religious leaders.
- Identify how you will stay up-to-date with evolving information about COVID-19. The CDC is a regularly updated resource.

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>

### Focus on what you can control

- Feeling prepared is a good way to lessen the stress and worry associated with COVID-19. You can create a kit of supplies to last you and any family members 3-5 days including any medications that you take regularly, water/food/electrolytes, thermometer, medicines for fever, and hygiene supplies.
- Create a list of resources in your community. This may include important phone numbers, websites, social media accounts of schools, doctors, public health authorities, social services, community mental health center, and crisis hotlines.
- During this time, grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, some take-out/delivery only restaurants, and hospitals remain open. Some grocery stores are offering curbside grocery pick up or specialized shopping hours for individuals who may be at higher risk from getting sick. Whenever possible—opt for curbside pick up of home delivery to minimize contact with others. If you are at higher risk of getting sick from COVID, identify if friends or family are able to pick up groceries and or medications for you.
- Focus on the “here and the now.” During stressful times it can be tempting to worry about the future. Instead problem-solve and set achievable goals for each day.

### Foster resiliency

- Recognize, acknowledge, and accept the reality of this new situation.
- Make a plan for how you will approach feelings of being overwhelmed or distressed. Preparing can make you feel more in control of how you will approach these feelings if they arise.
- Shift your negative statements into statements that allow you to function with less distress. Try changing “this is a terrible time” to “this is a terrible time, AND I can get through this.”

- Find ways to stay active both physically and mentally. Find games or puzzles that you can play online with others or do independently.
- Be prepared to think critically. Be willing to address misinformation about the virus and be aware that stigma and prejudice can occur against individuals who live in affected communities, against healthcare workers, and against individuals with other illnesses.

**Other resources:**

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990, National Crisis Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

### Facts about COVID-19

- Coronaviruses are part of a large virus family that causes illness. Symptoms of these viruses range from the common cold to more severe diseases. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified.
- Common infection symptoms of COVID-19 include: respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties.
- COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person. Currently, there are no available vaccines or other curative treatments available. The best way to prevent COVID-19 is to avoid exposure to the virus.
- Currently, older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease) are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.
- In order to help individuals, at higher risk of getting very sick, have access to adequate medical care, people are asked to practice social distancing (leaving six feet of distance between people), refrain from attending events, and congregating in groups larger than 10 individuals. People are also being asked to stay at home as much as possible (sheltering at home).

### Strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water (length of the A-B-C song) or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol</li> <li>• Avoid close contact with people who are sick</li> <li>• Stay home when sick</li> <li>• Cover the mouth and nose with a tissue or with the bend/crook of the arm when coughing or sneezing</li> <li>• Avoid crowds, reschedule/ cancel large events</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a supply of medications that you take regularly</li> <li>• Stay/work from home</li> <li>• Close community gathering areas</li> <li>• Use social distancing (6ft distance between people)</li> <li>• Isolate/self-quarantine if you are in a high risk group or may have been exposed to the virus</li> </ul> |
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