

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Managing the Impact (April 22, 2020)



You have been given this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members as a result of the questions and possible anxiety that has arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This news has placed global populations on alert causing varied reactions in different countries and regions including Canada and the United States of America.

It is normal during this time of uncertainty for us to speculate on the potential spread of the virus and to experience understandable reactions from worry to anxiety about this health concern. At this time, workers within health care and emergency services sectors and their families may be particularly vulnerable to strong reactions.

What are some possible reactions?

When we are uncertain about our own and our family's health and safety, we experience physical, emotional and behavioural reactions. You may experience a range of reactions varying in degrees of intensity as this outbreak continues to have a global impact. You may find yourself preoccupied with news events which may trigger worrying thoughts. We all react somewhat differently yet we may experience common reactions such as:

- **Emotional reactions.** Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, and uncertainty.
- **Mental reactions.** Disbelief about the extent of the outbreak, loss of concentration, recurring visions of media images about the pandemic, fearful thoughts about travelling, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, confusion, distressing dreams.
- **Physical reactions.** Numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, persistent heart palpitations, fatigue, nausea, and gastrointestinal problems.
- **Behavioural reactions.** Tearfulness, feeling disconnected, excessive vigilance, withdrawal or isolation from the mainstream population, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, increased consumption of alcohol or medication to cope with uncertainty.

Managing the Impact

Are these reactions “normal”?

Absolutely. These are normal reactions that human beings experience when they are in abnormally distressing situations. Research has shown that when you acknowledge anxiety and you take care of it, anxiety will usually diminish within a few weeks. Most people recover even after acute traumatic events and they return to normal or close to normal functioning, either on their own or with the assistance of a mental health professional.

Do these reactions always occur after hearing news of an outbreak?

Not always. Everyone experiences reactions in a way that is unique to themselves and their situation. When a viral outbreak occurs a long way away, the perceived risk can be viewed as less concerning. If you or someone you know is in closer proximity to an outbreak location, this can trigger a stronger reaction to the news. Some individuals experience delayed reactions, as a result of exposure to the news over time and this can invoke a growing sense of fear and anxiety.

Is there any way to avoid these types of reactions?

You can never avoid them completely. Even individuals who are well-informed and well-prepared may experience acute stress reactions in such situations. Police officers, paramedics, first-aid workers and fire fighters can have strong stress reactions to emergency situations, despite their training and experience. Remember that these are normal reactions.

What can you do?

- Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.
- Don't judge or blame yourself. Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient. Think about how you would support a friend in this situation and then treat yourself the same way.
- Try to reduce other sources of stress in your life for a while.
- Take the time to talk about your physical and emotional reactions with someone close to you like a friend, partner or loved one. You can also turn to coworkers.

- Let your family, colleagues and friends know how they could best support you during your period of stress. If they are doing something unhelpful, give yourself permission to let them know.
- Find something that helps distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy (leisure activities, hobbies, routine chores, warm baths, physical exercise, etc.), while others find it helpful to relax.
- Try to avoid saturation from exposure to the constant media coverage of this news.
- Take time to rest and maintain good sleep habits.
- If you find you are experiencing distressing thoughts and feeling anxious, remind yourself that most of us are safe and not affected by this disease.

What should you do if your stress reactions don't diminish from week to week?

It's better not to keep the worrying thoughts and anxieties all to yourself. People close to you don't always know how to help, despite their best intentions. If these reactions have not diminished from week to week, don't hesitate to contact your Employee & Family Assistance Program to meet with a professional. If you take good care of yourself, ensuring that you obtain the support you might need, you will gradually regain your normal sense of self and resume life activities

For additional information on the COVID-19 pandemic here are some helpful resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html>

World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/>

The COVID-19 Pandemic | Facts & General Information



You have been provided this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members as a result of the questions and possible anxiety that has arisen from the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

What is COVID-19?

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. The virus did not match any other known virus. This raised concern because when a virus is new, we do not know how it affects people. One week later, on 7 January, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new virus. On 11 February 2020, the WHO officially named the disease 'COVID-19'. According to the WHO, a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations.

How are COVID-19 infections diagnosed?

COVID-19 infections are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and laboratory tests. In many cases, travel history may be important.

How is COVID-19 treated?

According to Health Canada, currently, there are no specific treatments required for most people with COVID-19 infection, as most people with common coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. Your health care provider may recommend steps you can take to relieve symptoms.

Consult your health care provider as soon as possible if you are concerned about your symptoms or have travelled recently to a region where the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly widespread.

How do I reduce the risk of infection?

To reduce your risk of infection thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based rub; cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow; avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms; thoroughly cook meat and eggs and have no unprotected contact with live wild animals. The Government of Canada has issued an official global travel advisory, recommending avoidance of all non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice.

What is physical distancing? How does it help?

Previously referred to as social distancing, the concept and term have been updated to physical distancing. Physical distancing measures are a way to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 within communities. This means minimizing close contact with others during the pandemic. Physical distancing measures increase the physical space between people to slow the spread of the virus. Examples include working from home where possible, school closures and the postponement or cancellation of mass gathering events, such as sporting or entertainment events, conferences and religious ceremonies. This in turn lessens the burden on public healthcare systems as the virus is easily spread in densely populated areas. Various provinces have enacted laws under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, including fines for those violating distancing and gathering restrictions. Please remember: staying socially connected is truly imperative to everyone's mental health, particularly in this time of physical distancing. Virtually check on your family members, friends and colleagues to see how we are all coping throughout this stressful time.

Facts & General Information

The WHO have posted the following quick tips on how to best protect yourself from risk of infection:¹

1. Wash your hands frequently
Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
2. Maintain physical distancing
When someone coughs or sneezes they emit small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you may breathe in the droplets.
3. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
4. Practice respiratory hygiene.
Droplets spread the virus. By covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.
5. If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

How is Canada monitoring the situation?

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with international partners, including the World Health Organization, to actively monitor the situation. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer is in close contact with provincial and territorial Chief Medical Officers of Health to ensure that Canada is prepared to rapidly identify and manage COVID-19.² As of 20 March 2020, the Government of Canada implemented several measures to control our borders including closing the U.S. and Canadian border to all non-essential travel. Additionally, international flights are being directed to four primary airports including Calgary, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver international. The Canadian Government has closed the U.S. and Canadian border to all non-essential travel effective Saturday 21 March 2020.

Federal and provincial governments have implemented regulations for non-essential businesses and extended school closures. For up to date information please check your provincial government websites, or the following federal website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

The Government of Canada has also introduced several economic and financial plans to support those directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For detailed information on Canada's economic recovery plan, please check the following website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

Wellness Together Canada

During these complicated times, it is critical that Canadians obtain reliable information and access to mental health, addiction and well-being support services.

On April 15th, 2020, Health Canada launched the Wellness Together Canada portal, providing direct access to peer support workers, social workers, psychologists and other professional care providers for all Canadians.

Homewood Health is proud to be a key contributor. If you know someone struggling and requiring support during this difficult time, please share the link below.

<https://ca.portal.gs/?lang=en-ca>

As pandemic protocols remain in effect, grocery stores and supermarkets have been classified as essential businesses. Grocery chains and independently owned supermarkets have taken unprecedented steps to keep both customers and employees safe. Many locations are now operating with reduced hours to ensure cleaning and sanitation efforts continue with greater frequency. Additionally, floor stickers have been added to maintain distance requirements at checkout and limits placed on the number of customers permitted inside the stores at any given time. Consumers are asked to shop only when necessary and where possible limit trips to once a week, designating one family member to shopping duties. Several chains have reserved the first hour of daily operation exclusively for senior citizens and those who requiring physical assistance or support. Remember, to continue diligent efforts with your hand hygiene during and after shopping.

Facts & General Information

Fast Facts

- WHO has determined that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).
- Symptoms include: coughing, runny nose, sore throat, fever. Severe cases advance to include difficulty breathing and pneumonia.
- Usually, cases have mild symptoms. 1 in 4 cases has more severe symptoms.

People of all ages can be infected by COVID-19. Still, older individuals and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease appear to be more vulnerable.

Should I stay home from work?

If you're feeling ill, unwell or concerned, the best thing to do is speak to your manager, HR or occupational health and safety department within your organization. They're there to help.

Where can I get more information on COVID-19?

Here are some helpful links to gather more information.

Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html>

World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

For those persons who may be concerned they may have symptoms of COVID-19, the federal government has created an online self-assessment tool. You will be asked a series of questions and dependent upon the responses and symptoms identified, the tool will provide advice, giving one of the four following actions:

- Visit an emergency room
- Call telehealth

- Self-isolate at home
- Do nothing

The tool can be accessed here:

<https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en>

I feel very stressed about all of this. Should I still reach out to Homewood Health?

Absolutely. We are here for you 24/7/365 and will help get you the tools, resources and/or support you're looking for.

What if I was already seeing a counsellor in-person or have an upcoming appointment? How will I know what to do next?

You will be contacted shortly by the person you were seeing, or by Homewood Health, and we'll make the process really clear and simple for you so you understand how you will connect with the counsellor for your session.

Homewood Health would like to extend our thanks and express our gratitude to all first responders and health care workers, including those in public facing positions. We appreciate your efforts and support to help others during these difficult times.

References

1. World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public [cited 2020 Mar 2]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
2. Government of Canada. Coronavirus Infection (2020)[cited 2020 Jan 31]. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html>

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717

Numéro sans frais - en français : 1-866-398-9505

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