

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Tips for Self-care and Families

Taking care of yourself and your family during infectious disease outbreaks

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the coronavirus (COVID-19), can cause uncertainty and anxiety, and affect our mental health. This tip sheet provides some simple strategies to help you and your family manage stress.

Stay informed

Accessing reliable information during an infectious disease outbreak will help ensure you and your family members are taking appropriate steps to stay healthy.

Stay up-to-date about developments related to the infectious disease outbreak by using a reliable and accurate source of health-related information, for example, through the services listed below.

Australian Government Department of Health | www.health.gov.au

healthdirect hotline | 1800 022 222 | www.healthdirect.gov.au

Coronavirus Health Information Line | 1800 020 080

Tips to help you stay healthy and calm

Uncertainty and concern about catching an infectious disease, and protecting yourself and your family, can increase feelings of stress. The most important thing you can do is maintain basic hygiene and preventive measures (e.g. frequent handwashing). Here are some other effective ways to help manage stress and concern:

- Maintain a healthy diet, exercise and sleep regime.
- Talk to loved ones about worries and concerns.
- Engage in hobbies and enjoyable activities.
- Be prepared (e.g., develop a personal/family preparedness plan in case you are quarantined or need to self-isolate).
- Avoid or reduce the use of alcohol and tobacco.
- Limit media exposure. Today's 24-hour news cycle can make it difficult to turn away from the TV, radio, or news feed, but research has shown that excess media exposure to coverage of stressful events can result in negative mental health outcomes. Use trusted media outlets to gather the information you need, then turn them off.

Tips to help children and adolescents

Including your children in your family's health care plan will lead to better understanding, counter fear of the unknown, and help children and adolescents feel a sense of control.

- Ask children what they have heard about coronavirus.
- Provide age appropriate, accurate information and clarify any misinformation or misunderstanding they may have.
- Encourage children to share their concerns, and let them know that parents and teachers are available to discuss thoughts and feelings.
- The way parents behave can have a significant effect on children. Keep conversations calm and focussed on the facts. Emphasise efforts that are being taken to contain the infectious disease.
- Model health-promoting behaviours for your children. For example, teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds - as long as it takes to sing the happy birthday song twice.
- Educate the entire family about good health habits. Talk about what each family member can do to help others outside of the immediate family.
- Include children in family discussions and plans, in an age appropriate way.
- Address any misconceptions children may have that could result in stigmatising people or groups of people in the community.

If you are quarantined or need to self-isolate

- Maintain a normal daily routine as much as possible to help keep your spirits up.
- Make time for some exercise.
- Avoid or reduce the use of alcohol and tobacco.
- Stay connected with friends and family through social media and over the phone.
- Use your time purposefully, for example, working from home or getting homework sent to you.
- Take advantage of the time to do things that you've been wanting to do like reading a book or learning a new skill.

When to seek help

During infectious disease outbreaks, particularly in the early days when the nature and impact of the disease is still unknown, it is understandable to experience emotional distress about the outbreak and its potential impact on you, your family and your community.

If you are experiencing severe emotional distress or have mental health issues, speak with your GP or mental health practitioner. If you need to leave home to seek medical attention, wear a face mask (if you have one) to protect others, and call your health practitioner first to make them aware of your symptoms.

Adapted with permission from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University.

Please note that Phoenix Australia does not provide direct clinical care or referral services.