

# 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](http://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 coronavirus. That means staying home as much as possible (especially if you are not feeling well), washing hands often 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 (i.e. those with underlying health conditions or over the age of 60) and talk to them about their concerns and how you might be able to help them navigate the situation.

## **How can I keep myself calm?**

Three sources of information on coronavirus — mainstream media, politicians, and social media are giving mixed messages about coronavirus. This may create confusion and worry. To manage your anxiety the most important thing to remember is that most healthy people that get coronavirus experience only mild symptoms that are comparable to a cold or flu.

If you feel anxious, there are things you can do to keep yourself healthy and prepared:

- Create a stay at home plan for yourself and your family
- Avoid leisure related travel and crowds when possible
- Frequently wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Use appropriate hand sanitizers as a substitute for washing your hands when that is not available
- Frequently disinfect surfaces, like your desk, phone, tablet, smartphone, and countertops.
- Be able to prepare meals at home without having to shop for several days.

Keep in mind the situation is likely to be a marathon not a sprint so pace yourself. Take care of your basic needs and ensure rest between work shifts and stay in contact with family and friends through phone calls and video chats.

## **What can someone do if they have a job that still requires them to go 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 coronavirus cases there is worry of infection and implications for families, and moral distress as resources get rationed. Exhaustion, extreme stress and lack of sleep put someone at a higher risk for a severe case of coronavirus. 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 should talk to their leadership about what is being done to manage stress and exhaustion. There should be clear, consistent and daily communications about how the situation is evolving. Short debriefs are good and all concerns should be heard. Workers can create a system for rotation from high-stress to lower-stress roles. There should be a culture promoted that it's okay to say you are not okay and that breaks are encouraged and taking time to get proper sleep is mandatory. Workplaces can partner inexperienced workers with more experienced colleagues for peer support. Workplaces can create the ability for employees to talk with a licensed psychologist if possible.

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

If you have mild symptoms and you are breathing ok, stay somewhere that you can recover comfortably. Use over the counter cold medicines, drink plenty of fluids and get a lot of rest. People with mild cases should not attend work and should limit contact with others. If your symptoms do not go away, start to get worse, or you become concerned, contact your primary care provider. If you get really sick and have difficulty breathing, then get to the hospital.

While the availability of tests for coronavirus are improving, at the moment getting tested for is not easy. If you have recently traveled to a place where there is a known outbreak of coronavirus or you have been in contact with someone who you know has coronavirus, then it is a good idea to try and get tested. Call your health care provider for help on where to get tested. Most people can get better at home and it is best to avoid spreading it to more people.

### **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 exercises
- Keep an eye out for your children during this time, and for loved ones who already have mental illness.

Don't do these things:

- Use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.
- 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

### **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. Provide them with the above suggestions as well as the general FAQs and myths document. If they fall into a high-risk category, supply them with the special high risk FAQs. Project calm to the individual and remind them that with the proper precaution and preparation, they will be able to navigate through the coronavirus situation.

### **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>

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[www.coronavirusnetwork.org](http://www.coronavirusnetwork.org).

