

Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health

TIPS FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING, QUARANTINE, AND ISOLATION DURING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAK

In the event of an infectious disease outbreak like COVID 19, local officials often require the public to take measures to limit and control the spread of the disease. This tip sheet adapted from SAMHSA provides information about social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. The government has the right to enforce federal and state laws related to public health if people within the country get sick with highly contagious diseases that have the potential to develop into outbreaks or pandemics. This tip sheet describes feelings and thoughts you may have during and after social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. It also suggests ways to care for your behavioral health during these experiences.

What to Expect: Typical Reactions

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. People may feel:

Anxiety, worry, or fear related to:

- Your own health status
- The health status of others whom you may have exposed to the disease
- The resentment that your friends and family may feel if they need to go into quarantine as a result of contact with you
- The experience of monitoring yourself, or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of the disease
- Time taken off from work and the potential loss of income and job security
- The challenges of securing things you need, such as groceries and personal care items

Concern about being able to effectively care for children or others in your care

Uncertainty or frustration about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future

Loneliness associated with feeling cut off from the world and from loved ones

Anger if you think you were exposed to the disease because of others' negligence

Boredom and frustration because you may not be able to work or engage in regular day-to-day activities

Uncertainty or ambivalence about the situation

A desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope

Symptoms of depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite, or sleeping too little or too much

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as intrusive distressing memories, flashbacks (reliving the event), nightmares, changes in thoughts and mood, and being easily startled

If you or a loved one experience any of these reactions for 2 to 4 weeks or more, contact your health care provider.

Ways to Support Yourself During Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation

UNDERSTAND THE RISK Consider the real risk of harm to yourself and others around you. The public perception of risk during a situation such as an infectious disease outbreak is often inaccurate. Media coverage may create the impression that people are in immediate risk. Take steps to get the facts:

- Stay up to date on what is happening, while limiting your media exposure.
- Avoid watching or listening to news reports 24/7 since this tends to increase anxiety and worry.
- Remember that children are especially affected by what they hear and see on television.
- Look to credible sources for information on the infectious disease outbreak

BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

Speaking out about your needs is particularly important if you are in quarantine, since you may not be in a hospital or other facility where your basic needs are met. Ensure you have what you need to feel safe, secure, and comfortable.

- Inform health care providers or health authorities of any needed medications and work with them to ensure that you continue to receive those medications.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Health care providers and health authorities provide information on the disease, its diagnosis, and treatment.

- Do not be afraid to ask questions—clear communication with a health care provider may help reduce any distress associated with social distancing, quarantine, or isolation.
- Ask for written information when available.
- Ask a family member or friend to obtain information in the event that you are unable to secure this information on your own.

WORK WITH YOUR EMPLOYER TO REDUCE FINANCIAL STRESS

If you're unable to work during this time, you may experience stress related to your job status or financial situation

- Provide your employer with a clear explanation of why you are away from work.
- Contact the U.S. Department of Labor at 1-866-4USWAGE (1-866-487-9243) about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows U.S. employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for serious medical conditions, or to care for a family member with a serious medical condition.
- Contact your utility providers, cable and Internet provider, and other companies from whom you get monthly bills to explain your situation and request alternative bill payment arrangements as needed.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Reaching out to people you trust is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom during social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. You can:

- Use the telephone, email, text messaging, and social media to connect with friends and family
- Talk “face to face” with friends and loved ones using Skype or FaceTime.
- If approved by health authorities and your health care providers, arrange for your friends and loved ones to bring you newspapers, movies, and books.
- Sign up for emergency alerts via text or email to ensure you get updates as soon as they are available.
- Call SAMHSA’s free 24-hour Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990, if you feel lonely or need support.
- Use the Internet, radio, and television to keep up with local, national, and world events.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR If you are in a medical facility, you may have access to health care providers who can answer your questions. However, if you are quarantined at home, and you’re worried about physical symptoms you or your loved ones may be experiencing, call your health care provider

- Ask your provider whether it would be possible to schedule remote appointments via Skype or FaceTime for mental health, substance use, or physical health needs.

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO COPE AND RELAX

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray, or engage in activities you enjoy.
- Talk about your experiences and feelings to loved ones and friends, if you find it helpful.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking; consider keeping a journal where you write down things you are grateful for or that are going well.

After Social Distancing, Quarantine, or Isolation

You may experience mixed emotions, including a sense of relief. If you were isolated because you had the illness, you may feel sadness or anger because friends and loved ones may have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious.

The best way to end this common fear is to learn about the disease and the actual risk to others. Sharing this information will often calm fears in others and allow you to reconnect with them.

If you or your loved ones experience symptoms of extreme stress—such as trouble sleeping, problems with eating too much or too little, inability to carry out routine daily activities, or using drugs or alcohol to cope—speak to a health care provider.

What Is Social Distancing? Social distancing is a way to keep people from interacting closely or frequently enough to spread an infectious disease. Schools and other gathering places such as movie theaters may close, and sports events and religious services may be cancelled.

What Is Quarantine? Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. It lasts long enough to ensure the person has not contracted an infectious disease.

What Is Isolation? Isolation prevents the spread of an infectious disease by separating people who are sick from those who are not. It lasts as long as the disease is contagious.

Important Links and Contacts:

Command Center: 617-414-6860 (operating 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily)

Call for any needs related to COVID-19.

Working Well Clinic: Covid19WWC@bmc.org

Staff and providers should use this email address to report symptoms of and possible exposure to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Information on the Hub: <https://internal.bmc.org/news-events/news/where-find-information-about-covid-19-coronavirus-disease>

This is our intranet and requires network access. Everything posted here related to COVID-19 is also posted on the external site listed below, including clinical guidelines, screening, testing, and PPE usage.

COVID-19 Information on BMC.org: <https://www.bmc.org/covid-19-information-employees>

This is hosted on the external website and is accessible when not on the network.

Sources for Reliable Outbreak Related Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road

Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

<http://www.cdc.gov>

World Health Organization

Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization

525 23rd Street, NW Washington, DC 20037

202-974-3000

<http://www.who.int/en>

Take Advantage of Headspace

Headspace is offering free meditations that might be helpful for Stress related to Covid-19: <https://www.headspace.com/covid-19>

BU Faculty, Staff, and Students have free access to the mindfulness and medication application, Headspace. Please don't forget to take advantage of this free resource during this stressful time.