

# Stress management for **Health Care Workers**

Healthy Workplaces:  
A response to the  
**COVID-19**  
pandemic



# What Is The **Covid-19** Pandemic?

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and in March 2020, it was classified as a pandemic.

As countries and public health authorities around the world are acting to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, this time of crisis can result in heightened fear and anxiety.



Is it okay to feel  
**Stressed?**

As health workers, feeling under pressure or stressed is a likely experience for you. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. The feeling of stress may be keeping you going at your job and providing a sense of purpose.

However, if you notice your stress is worsening and you feel overwhelmed, you are not to be blamed. This is an unprecedented crisis, and everyone experiences stress and copes with it differently. If the stress becomes overwhelming, please approach your lead or the appropriate person to ensure you are provided with appropriate support.

Protecting your mental health is as important as protecting your physical health and we are ensuring that you have the best possible capacity to manage the demands of this crisis. It is also important that you stay informed and ensure that you are keeping up to date with new advice.

# What can make me feel **Stressed**?

Stressors experienced by the general public can also be experienced by you, such as fear of falling ill and dying.

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*In addition, you may experience stressors unique to your work role:*

- Stigmatization from family, friends or the community due to a fear that frontline workers will pass on COVID-19 as a result of your work.
- Strict biosecurity measures may prevent spontaneity and autonomy due to the physical strain of protective equipment, the physical isolation making it difficult to provide comfort to someone who is sick or in distress, constant awareness and vigilance and strict procedures to follow.
- Higher demands in the work setting, including long work hours, increased patient numbers, higher exposure to patient suffering and mortality and keeping up to-date with best practices as information about COVID-19 develops.
- Reduced capacity to use social support due to intense work schedules.
- Insufficient information about the long-term exposure to individuals infected by COVID-19
- Ongoing personal life stressors can additionally cause stress to you.

# How can I tell when I am **Stressed**?

- Your mood may change such as increased irritability, feeling low or more anxious
- You may feel chronically exhausted or it may feel harder to relax during respite periods
- You may have unexplained physical complaints such as body pain or stomach aches.
- You may notice changes in how you are working such as an increase in the number of mistakes or accidents at work.

# What can I do if I am **Stressed**?

- Take care of your basic needs, create a routine in your daily life.
- Ensure sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts.
- Eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions.
- Stay in contact with family, friends and loved ones through digital methods such as WhatsApp



- Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons (e.g. social worker, religious leader or community elder) for social support- your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you. Where possible, be a part of a peer support group.
- Utilize the strategies or skills that you have used in the past to manage times of stress.
- Have a plan as to where you can go and seek help for physical and mental health and psychosocial needs.

## How can I tell when I need external Help?

It is important that you seek support as early as possible if you experience a deterioration in your well-being. Chronic stress can have long-lasting effects on physical and mental health, even after the emergency ends.

*If the symptoms of stress described above become worse, then you need to seek immediate care.*

## Where can I get Help?

Assigned counsellors are available to all health care workers and can be easily assessed. The contact information is available at the end of the brochure.

# What measures can health care managers take to prevent **Stress** in workers?

*If you are a team leader or manager, keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they have a better capacity to fulfil their roles. It is important that you:*

- Regularly and supportively monitor your staff for their wellbeing and foster an environment which promotes staff speaking with you if their mental well-being worsens.
- Ensure good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to your staff.
- Ensure your staff gets the rest and recuperation they need.
- Provide a brief and regular forum to allow workers to express their concerns, ask questions and encourage peer support amongst colleagues.
- Role model self-care strategies to mitigate stress.

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## References

World Health Organization. Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During COVID-19 Outbreak

Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Interim Briefing Note. Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 outbreak.

# Recommendations for coping with stress and mental well-being.

The recommendations for coping with stress and mental well-being produced by the Pan American Health Organization/ World Health Organization can be found at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpYblKqq6ig> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAWbMcDrK0I>

*To view videos, click on "play button"*