

COVID-19 Responder Behavioral Health, Stress and Coping:

The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and community you live in. People who are helping with the response to COVID-19 are at increased risk of experiencing stress or burnout.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and health to your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions:

- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.

Responder Self-Care Techniques

- Limit working hours to no longer than 12-hour shifts.
- Work in teams and limit amount of time working alone.
- Write in a journal.

- Talk to family, friends, supervisors, and teammates about your feelings and experiences.
- Practice breathing and relaxation techniques.
- Engage in physical activity
 - List of streaming exercises [here](#)
- Maintain a healthy diet and get adequate sleep and exercise.
- Know that it is okay to draw boundaries and say “no.”
- Avoid or limit caffeine and use of alcohol.

Responders should be reminded:

- It is not selfish to take breaks.
- The needs of survivors are not more important than your own needs and well-being.
- Working all the time does not mean you will make your best contribution.
- There are other people who can help in the response.

Responding to disasters can be both rewarding and stressful. Knowing that you have stress and coping with it as you respond will help you stay well, and this will allow you to keep helping those who are affected.

Self-assessment is vital to successful stress management and self-care. Here are some tools to monitor your stress:

- **Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQol)** Measure could be found [here](#)
- **Self-care assessment worksheet** could be found [here](#)

Resources:

- For more information on Managing Stress Associated with the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak visit the NCPTSD [here](#)
- For more on CDC’s guidelines on managing anxiety and stress during COVID-19 could be found [here](#)
- SAMSHA’s Disaster Responder Stress Management Toolkit can be found [here](#)

- For more information on how to care for children, youth and elders visit the Chicago Department of Public Health's website [here](#)

If stress persists and you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to function at home and at work, participate in formal help.

The following are free mental health resources available to all Chicago residents:

- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
- NAMI Chicago Helpline mental health counselor by calling 311 or directly at 833-626-4244
- Bright Star Community Outreach's trauma counseling helpline at 833-TURN-123
- Illinois Warm Line (866) 359-7953.
- Connect to free teletherapy services at Chicago Department of Public Health Mental Health Centers by calling 312-747-1020
- For afterhours support, contact Crisis Text Line which serves anyone, in any type of crisis, 24-hours a day. Instructions: Text HELLO to 741741 to access a trained crisis counselor or call: 1-800-273-8255 to speak to a counselor 24/7
- If you are a victim of domestic violence don't wait for it to get worse call: 1-800-799-7233 or visit <https://thehotline.org/help/>
- If you would like to speak to the Chicago Department of Public Health's Emergency Preparedness Program's Psychologist Nikoleta Boukydis, she can be reached at (312) 497-0123 and at nikoleta.boukydis@cityofchicago.org. All support sessions are confidential.