

The COVID-19 Pandemic:

Managing the Impact (September 8, 2020)



You have been given this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members as a result of the questions and possible anxiety that has arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we maneuver through COVID-19 and talk of a potential resurgence in the Fall, the pandemic continues to dominate world news. As a result, global populations are experiencing various levels of concern with varied reactions in different countries and regions including Canada and the United States of America.

It is normal during this time of uncertainty for us to speculate on the potential spread of the virus and to experience understandable reactions from worry to anxiety about this health concern. At this time, essential, front-line workers, and those returning to physical workplaces and their families may be particularly vulnerable to strong reactions.

What are some possible reactions?

When we are uncertain about our own and our family's health and safety, we experience physical, emotional and behavioural reactions. You may experience a range of reactions varying in degrees of intensity as this outbreak continues to have a global impact. You may find yourself

preoccupied with news events which may trigger worrying thoughts. We all react somewhat differently yet we may experience common reactions such as:

- **Emotional reactions.** Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, and uncertainty.
- **Mental reactions.** Disbelief about the extent of the outbreak, loss of concentration, recurring visions of media images about the pandemic, fearful thoughts about travelling, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, confusion, distressing dreams.
- **Physical reactions.** Numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, persistent heart palpitations, fatigue, nausea, and gastrointestinal problems.
- **Behavioural reactions.** Tearfulness, feeling disconnected, excessive vigilance, withdrawal or isolation from the mainstream population, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, increased consumption of alcohol or medication to cope with uncertainty.

Managing the Impact

Are these reactions “normal”?

Absolutely. These are normal reactions that human beings experience when they are in abnormally distressing situations. Research has shown that when you acknowledge anxiety and you take care of it, anxiety will usually diminish within a few weeks. Most people recover even after acute traumatic events and they return to normal or close to normal functioning, either on their own or with the assistance of a mental health professional.

Do these reactions always occur after hearing news of an outbreak?

Not always. Everyone experiences reactions in a way that is unique to themselves and their situation. If you or someone you know is in close proximity to a hotspot location, this may trigger stronger reactions to media coverage and updates. Some individuals experience delayed reactions, as a result of exposure to the news over time and this can invoke a growing sense of fear and anxiety.

Is there any way to avoid these types of reactions?

You can never avoid them completely. Even individuals who are well-informed and well-prepared may experience acute stress reactions in such situations. Police officers, paramedics, first-aid workers and fire fighters can have strong stress reactions to emergency situations, despite their training and experience. Remember that these are normal reactions.

What can you do?

- Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.
- Don't judge or blame yourself. Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient. Think about how you would support a friend in this situation and then treat yourself the same way.
- Try to reduce other sources of stress in your life for a while.
- Take the time to talk about your physical and emotional reactions with someone close to you like a friend, partner or loved one. You can also turn to coworkers.

- Let your family, colleagues and friends know how they could best support you during your period of stress. If they are doing something unhelpful, give yourself permission to let them know.
- Find something that helps distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy (leisure activities, hobbies, routine chores, warm baths, physical exercise, etc.), while others find it helpful to relax.
- Try to avoid saturation from exposure to the constant media coverage of this news.
- Take time to rest and maintain good sleep habits.
- If you find you are experiencing distressing thoughts and feeling anxious, remind yourself that most of us are safe and not affected by this disease.

What should you do if your stress reactions don't diminish from week to week?

It's better not to keep the worrying thoughts and anxieties all to yourself. People close to you don't always know how to help, despite their best intentions. If these reactions have not diminished from week to week, don't hesitate to contact your Employee & Family Assistance Program to meet with a professional. If you take good care of yourself, ensuring that you obtain the support you might need, you will gradually regain your normal sense of self and resume life activities

For additional information on the COVID-19 pandemic here are some helpful resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html>

World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/>

The COVID-19 Pandemic | Facts & General Information



You have been provided this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members as a result of the questions and possible anxiety that has arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is COVID-19?

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. The virus did not match any other known virus. This raised concern because when a virus is new, we do not know how it affects people. One week later, on 7 January, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new virus. On 11 February 2020, the WHO officially named the disease 'COVID-19'. According to the WHO, a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations.

How are COVID-19 infections diagnosed?

COVID-19 infections are diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms and laboratory tests. In many cases, travel history and social contact without adequate distance between persons may be important.

How is COVID-19 treated?

According to Health Canada, currently, there are no specific treatments required for most people with COVID-19

infection, as most people with common coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. Your health care provider may recommend steps you can take to relieve symptoms.

Consult your health care provider as soon as possible if you are concerned about your symptoms or have travelled recently to a location where the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly widespread.

How do I reduce the risk of infection?

To reduce your risk of infection thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based rub; where mandated and if possible, wear a protective mask in public spaces; cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow; avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms. The Government of Canada has issued an official global travel advisory, recommending avoidance of all non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice.

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What is physical distancing? How does it help?

Previously referred to as social distancing, the concept and term have been updated to physical distancing. Physical distancing measures are a way to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 within communities. This means minimizing close contact with others during the pandemic. Physical distancing measures increase the physical space between people to slow the spread of the virus. Examples include working from home where possible, school closures and the postponement or cancellation of mass gathering events, such as sporting or entertainment events, conferences and religious ceremonies. This in turn lessens the burden on public healthcare systems as the virus is easily spread in densely populated areas. Various provinces had previously enacted laws under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which included fines for those violating distancing and gathering restrictions. Although many jurisdictions have started to ease restrictions, many still have limits on the number of persons allowed to assemble together. Please remember: staying socially connected is truly imperative to everyone's mental health, particularly in this time of physical distancing. Virtually check on your family members, friends and colleagues to see how we are all coping throughout this stressful time.

Mask protocols

In numerous jurisdictions and public spaces, the wearing of masks has been mandated as a primary safety protocol with the intent of limiting the spread of the virus and the risk of infection. There are some exceptions for those with pre-existing health conditions and those under certain ages. Please check with your local health authorities for up to date information and details.

For some, wearing a mask may be a difficult undertaking. Persons who struggle with claustrophobia, or stress and anxiety may experience panic attacks. Here are a few suggestions on how to manage and reduce those anxious moments.

- Take slow, deep breaths.
Tell yourself that you can breathe. Squeeze and release your muscles. Close your eyes and imagine you are in a comfortable and safe place. Focus on your breathing intake and exhale slowly, where possible, listen to music and focus on the sounds.

- Take breaks and give yourself space.
If you must be in public areas for long periods of time, take breaks and find somewhere secluded where you can take off your mask. Take as long as you need.
- Take someone within your safety bubble with you.
Have a family member or trusted friend accompany you when you must be in public spaces. If you feel overwhelmed, let them know, so they can help.
- Remember why you're doing it.
Wearing a mask is a gesture of kindness to others. When you are feeling stressed, it might make you feel better knowing that you are helping your community.

The WHO have posted the following quick tips on how to best protect yourself from risk of infection:¹

1. Wash your hands frequently
Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
2. Maintain physical distancing
When someone coughs or sneezes they emit small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you may breathe in the droplets.
3. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
4. Practice respiratory hygiene.
Droplets spread the virus. By covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.
5. If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

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How is Canada monitoring the situation?

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with international partners, including the World Health Organization, to actively monitor the situation. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer is in close contact with provincial and territorial Chief Medical Officers of Health to ensure best practice guidelines are communicated and where possible implemented to rapidly identify and manage COVID-19 and further risk or spread of infection.²

As of 20 March 2020, the Government of Canada implemented several measures to control our borders including closing the U.S. and Canadian border to all non-essential travel. Additionally, international flights are being directed to four primary airports including Calgary, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver international. The Canada, U.S. border closure has been extended to September 21, 2020 until further notice.

As other travel restrictions ease, Canada's four largest airports; Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver will begin fever checks for domestic passengers by the end of July. International temperature checks will begin by the end of June, and all remaining Canadian airports will begin temperature checks by the end of September.

Federal and provincial governments have implemented regulations for non-essential businesses. School districts across the country are currently investigating and modifying safety strategies for the start of the 2020/2021 school year. For up to date information please check your provincial government websites, or the following federal website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

The Government of Canada has introduced several economic and financial plans to support those directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has also announced additional funding for safe-restart support for all provinces and territories. For detailed information on Canada's economic recovery plan, please check the following website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

Back to school

As many school boards across the country prepare for an in-person return to instruction at both elementary and high school levels, a number of measures are yet to be finalized. Although physical distancing and face masks are being recommended for students, teachers and support staff, regional considerations and variances exist. Please use the following links for details on your return to school policies and guidelines.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/who-heads-back-to-class-in-september-a-look-at-school-reopenings-by-province-1.5042739>

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Province	More information on school re-entry
Alberta	https://www.alberta.ca/k-to-12-school-re-entry-2020-21-school-year.aspx
British Columbia	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school
Manitoba	https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=48837
New Brunswick	https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/news/news_release.2020.06.0344.html
Newfoundland	https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/eecd/0706n01/
Nova Scotia	https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/education/
Ontario	https://www.ontario.ca/page/guide-reopening-ontarios-schools
Prince Edward Island	https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/topic/back-school
Quebec	https://www.quebec.ca/en/education/back-to-school-plan-fall-covid-19/
Saskatchewan	https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2020/august/04/safe-school-plan
Nunavut	https://gov.nu.ca/education/information/2020-21-opening-plan-nunavut-schools
Northwest Territories	https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/gnwt-releases-reopening-schools-safely-plan-2020-2021-school-year
Yukon	https://yukon.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19-information/education-and-school-supports-covid-19/planning-2020-21#school-operations-in-the-2020%E2%80%9221-school-year