



Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

What You Should Know

When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease such as Ebola, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal, and may be more likely or pronounced in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease outbreak, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress, and know when to get help.

Know the Signs of Stress

What follows are behavioral, physical, emotional, and cognitive responses that are all common signs of anxiety and stress. You may notice some of them after you learn about an infectious disease outbreak.

YOUR BEHAVIOR:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol, tobacco use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Know When To Get Help

You may experience serious distress when you hear about an infectious disease outbreak, even if you are at little or no risk of getting sick. If you or someone you know shows signs of stress (see list at left) for several days or weeks, get help by accessing one of the resources at the end of this tip sheet. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline right away if you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill him- or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.



YOUR BODY:

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

YOUR EMOTIONS:

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling angry
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness

YOUR THINKING:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Having difficulty making decisions

Know How To Relieve Stress

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE:

Set limits on how much time you spend reading or watching news about the outbreak. You will want to stay up to date on news of the outbreak, particularly if you have loved ones in places where many people have gotten sick. But make sure to take time away from the news to focus on things in your life that are going well and that you can control.

GET THE FACTS:

Find people and resources you can depend on for accurate health information. Learn from them about the outbreak and how you can protect yourself against illness, if you are at risk. You may turn to your family doctor, a state or local health department, U.S. government agencies, or an international organization. Check out the sidebar on the next page for links to good sources of information about infectious disease outbreaks.

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY:

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO RELAX:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.



Take care of your physical health to help lower your stress. Take a break to focus on positive parts of your life, like connections with loved ones.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY, FEELINGS, AND SPIRIT:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event, and think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions, and behavior around past events.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you.
- Connect with others who may be experiencing stress about the outbreak. Talk about your feelings about the outbreak, share reliable health information, and enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak, to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your lives.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

Sources for Credible Outbreak-Related Health Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
<https://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>

Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

Email: info@samhsa.hhs.gov

SAMHSA Store: https://store.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA Hotlines

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English and español)

SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746

SMS (español): "Hablamos" al 66746

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

Website in English: https://

www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov

Website in Spanish: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/
disaster-distress-helpline/espanol

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral
Information Service in English and español)

Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-
helpline

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

Website in English: https://

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Website in Spanish: https://

suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol

Treatment Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Website: https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/home

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov

Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac

**Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

Phone Supports		
Name	Phone Number	Type of Support
Peer Recovery Warmline (Mon-Fri 8AM-10PM;Sat-Sun 5 PM-10PM;Holidays 3PM-10PM)	1-877-292-5588	Peer-run service providing telephone support to mental health consumers as they work towards their recovery.
Bridgeway PESS	1-908-526-4100	Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Crisis Hotline, Family Crisis Services, Mobile Outreach
NAMI Text (24/7) NAMI Helpline (M-F 10 AM - 6 PM ET)	Crisis: Text NAMI to 741741 Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)	NAMI Crisis Text Line; Helpline is a warmline to provide sympathy, support and local resources
Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7 phone support)	1-800-273-8255 with a specialized Crisis Line for Veterans:Press 1	24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones
NJ Hopeline (24/7 phone support)	1-855-654-6735	"Need someone to talk to? We are here to help."
Crisis Text Line (24/7 text support)	Text HOME to 741741	Crisis counseling via text available 24/7
2NDFLOOR – for Youth (24/7 call or text)	1-888-222-2228	Confidential/anonymous helpline 24/7; CALL/TEXT
The Trevor Project – for Youth (call or text 24/7)	TrevorLifeline1-866-488-7386 TrevorText; Text 678678	24/7 support for LGBTQ youth in crisis, feeling suicidal, or in need of a safe and judgment-free place to talk.
NJ Coronavirus Call Center (24/7)	1-800-222-1222 or 1-800-962-1253	24/7 Hotline for COVID-19 questions
Mental Health Helpline 7 days, 8 am – 8 pm	(866) 202-HELP (4357)	Free helpline offers emotional support, info and assistance
Reach NJ (24/7)	1-844-ReachNJ (732-2465)	24/7 hotline to get persons living with addiction help
NJ IME Addictions Access Center(24/7)	1-844-276-2777	24/7 assistance and referral to treatment for substance use
Online Supports and Meetings		
Name	Website	Type of Support
SMART Recovery	www.smartrecovery.org/community	Online Peer Support Community
Unity Recovery	https://unityrecovery.zoom.us/my/allrecovery	7 days/week at 9am, 12pm, 3pm and 9pm EST
Step-Chat In The Rooms	www.intherooms.com www.stepchat.com	Online Recovery Support Meetings
NAMI NJ	www.naminj.org/online-support-groups/	Online weekly support groups
Alcoholics Anonymous	www.aaphonemeetings.org www.aa-intergroup.org/directory.php www.aaspeaker.com	Online 12-Step Resources and Meetings
Narcotics Anonymous	www.nabyphone.com www.na-recovery.org	Online 12-Step Resources and Meetings