

# Coping with COVID-19: Psychosocial support

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**PAHO**

# OUTLINE



- Specific stressors and common responses to the COVID-19 pandemic
- What is mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)?
- Key messages and resources to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - Communities
  - Older adults
  - People with disabilities
  - Children
  - Adults in isolation and quarantine

# IT IS COMMON AND NORMAL FOR INDIVIDUALS TO FEEL STRESSED AND WORRIED IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19



Specific stressors particular to the COVID-19 pandemic are:

The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Worsening of mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs



## COMMON RESPONSES TO COVID-19 MIGHT INCLUDE:



### **FEAR OF...**

Falling ill, death, losing livelihoods, being separated from loved ones, isolation and quarantine...

### **FEELINGS OF...**

Helplessness, boredom, loneliness, depression, anger, mistrust...

### **SOCIAL STIGMA...**

Towards persons who have been infected and their family members, those caring for patients, specific ethnic groups, population groups or nationalities...

## THERE ARE ALSO POSITIVE EXPERIENCES...



### *Italians Find 'a Moment of Joy in This Moment of Anxiety'*

Under lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, song breaks out from rooftops, balconies and windows.



- Pride in finding ways of coping and resilience
- Altruism and cooperation
- Satisfaction in helping others

Safety matters for all: patients and health workers

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/world/europe/italians-find-a-moment-of-joy-in-this-moment-of-anxiety.html>

# MHPSS Intervention Pyramid: Adapting Interventions to COVID-19

**IASC** Inter-Agency  
Standing Committee

## Interim Briefing Note

### **ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK** **Version 1.5**

February 2020  
IASC Reference Group on Mental Health  
and Psychosocial Support in Emergency  
Settings

## COVID-19 adapted interventions

### Examples:

Tele-mental Health or virtual consultations  
Procedures to minimize infection of COVID-19.  
interventions to be delivered or supported  
remotely without the need of a provider

Specialized  
services

Focused  
person to person  
non-specialized  
supports

#### Tele –mental health

- for people with pre-existing and newly-developed MH conditions including suicide plans or behavior.
- Frontline Health Workers

Strengthening  
Community and  
family supports

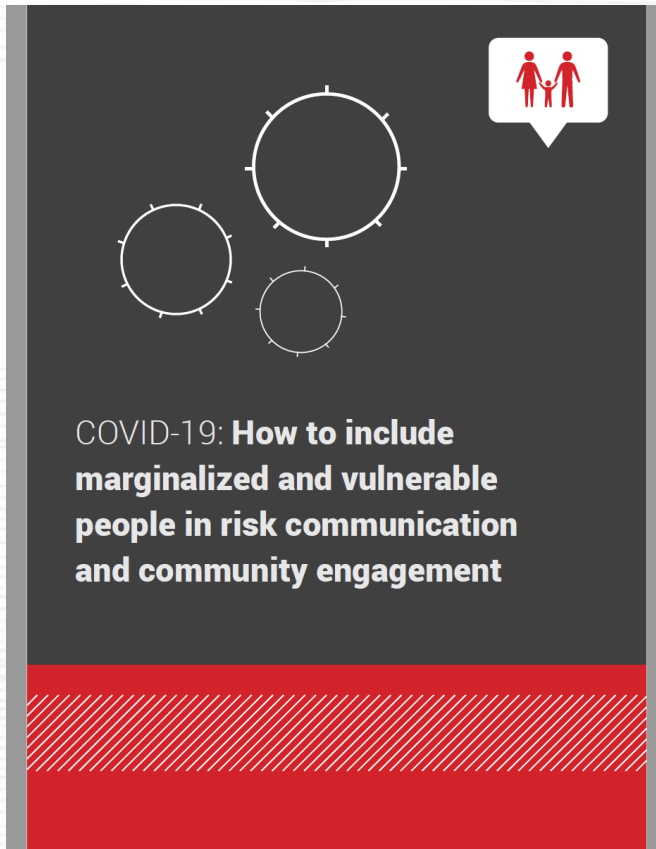
Social connectedness and community-based coping mechanisms for people separated by physical distancing measures are supported (e.g. tele- or social media peer support groups)

Social considerations in basic  
services and security

Risk communication,  
Safe and effective communication is reinforced to increase good practices, promote positive coping and wellbeing in the general population and specific target groups



# Populations at disproportionate risk in public health emergencies, and key implications for risk communication and community engagement



- Children
- People with disabilities
- Women and girls
- Pregnant women
- People living with HIV
- Gender Based Violence Survivors
- Refugees and Migrants
- Elderly
- People living with pre- MH & Med
- Sexual and Gender Minorities
- Ethnic Minorities

# PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV



## Actions to include:

- Utilize established community systems to facilitate communication with people living with HIV, to avoid treatment disruptions.
- Develop Q /As/FAQs in consultation with the people living with HIV community that respond to their specific vulnerabilities and concerns.
- Where possible, provide multi-month prescriptions to ensure that people living with HIV are able to have a few month's supply of ARV.
- Suggest that people living with HIV keep a supply of non-perishable food in order that they are able to take their medication.
- Provide psycho-social support to people living with HIV who may already feel anxious, stigmatized and vulnerable



## COMMUNITIES: KEY MESSAGES




- It is normal to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.
- Talk to people you trust. Contact your friends and family.
- If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle. Keep in touch with family and friends through email, phone calls and making use of social media platforms.
- Don't use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions.
- If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker, social worker, similar professional, or another trusted person in your community (e.g., religious leader or community elder).
- Have a plan where to go and seek help for physical and mental health and psychosocial needs, if required.
- Get the facts about your risk and how to take precautions. Use credible sources to get information, such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.
- Decrease the time you and your family spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.
- Draw on skills that you have used in the past during difficult times to manage your emotions during this outbreak.

# COMMUNITIES: RESOURCES




## PAHO SOCIAL MEDIA POSTCARDS: BE KIND


Be **KIND** to address fear during  
#coronavirus



Show empathy with those affected




Learn about the disease to assess the risks




Adopt practical measures to stay safe


Be **KIND** to address stigma during  
#coronavirus



Share the latest facts & avoid hyperbole




Show solidarity with affected people




Tell the stories of people who have experienced the virus


Be **KIND** to support loved ones during  
#coronavirus




Check in regularly especially with those affected



Encourage them to keep doing what they enjoy



Share PAHO/WHO information to manage anxieties



Provide calm and correct advice for your children



## COMMUNITIES: RESOURCES



### PAHO SOCIAL MEDIA POSTCARDS: BE SUPPORTIVE





## OLDER ADULTS: KEY MESSAGES




- Provide **practical** and **emotional support** through **informal networks** (families and peers) and health professionals.
- Share **simple facts** about what is going on and give **clear information** about how to reduce the risk of infection in words that older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way.
- **Be prepared** and know in advance **where and how to get practical help** if needed, such as calling a taxi, having food delivered and requesting medical care.
- Keep **regular contact with loved ones** (e.g. via phone or other means).
- Keep to **regular routines and schedules** as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting or other activities.









# OLDER ADULTS: RESOURCES

## COVID-19

Coronavirus Disease 2019

### 10 WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE ELDERLY AND PEOPLE WITH UNDERLYING CONDITIONS LIVING WITH YOU



-  **Monitor their health for symptoms of COVID-19**, like fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.
-  **If anyone in the household has symptoms**, avoid physical contact and take heightened prevention measures.
-  **If they have COVID-19 symptoms**, contact a healthcare provider immediately.
-  **Encourage them to maintain a healthy lifestyle**: eat nutritious foods, get enough sleep, don't smoke, stay active and limit alcohol use.
-  **Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces** and keep the house well ventilated.
-  **Avoid sharing objects** like glasses, cutlery and towels.
-  **Make sure they have at least a month's stock of all their regular medicines** in case it's necessary to stay home. Encourage them to follow medical advice about medication.
-  **Follow social distancing measures in your area and avoid shared spaces and large gatherings.**
-  **If going to the doctor, wear a mask**, if available, and **avoid public transport if possible.**
-  **Be kind and show empathy.** Talk and listen to them. Help them cope with stress.

**PAHO** Pan American Health Organization World Health Organization  
BE AWARE. PREPARE. ACT.  
www.paho.org/coronavirus

## COVID-19

Coronavirus Disease 2019

### 10 WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE ELDERLY AND/OR PEOPLE WITH UNDERLYING CONDITIONS LIVING ALONE



-  **Check on them frequently**, preferably by phone given the risk of transmission.
-  **If you visit them**, maintain a distance of at least 1 meter and avoid physical contact (handshakes, hugs).
-  **Buy groceries, supplies and medicines for them.**
-  **Make sure they have at least a month's stock of all their regular medicines** in case they need to stay home.
-  **Help them connect with doctors, neighbors, friends and family** if needed.
-  **Remind them to wash their hands frequently**, keep objects and surfaces clean, and **avoid physical contact with those who are sick.**
-  **Make a plan in case they fall ill and decide how transportation will be arranged to seek health care.**
-  **Encourage them to maintain a healthy lifestyle**: eat nutritious foods, get enough sleep, don't smoke, stay active and limit alcohol use.
-  **Be kind and show empathy.** Talk and listen to them. Help them cope with stress. Once the pandemic is over, you will hug again!
-  **If your loved one is in a home for the elderly, avoid visits. Use phone, video chat or email to keep in touch.**

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## COVID-19

Coronavirus Disease 2019

### 10 WAYS TO PREPARE AND PROTECT YOURSELF 60+ AND/OR LIVING WITH UNDERLYING CONDITIONS\*



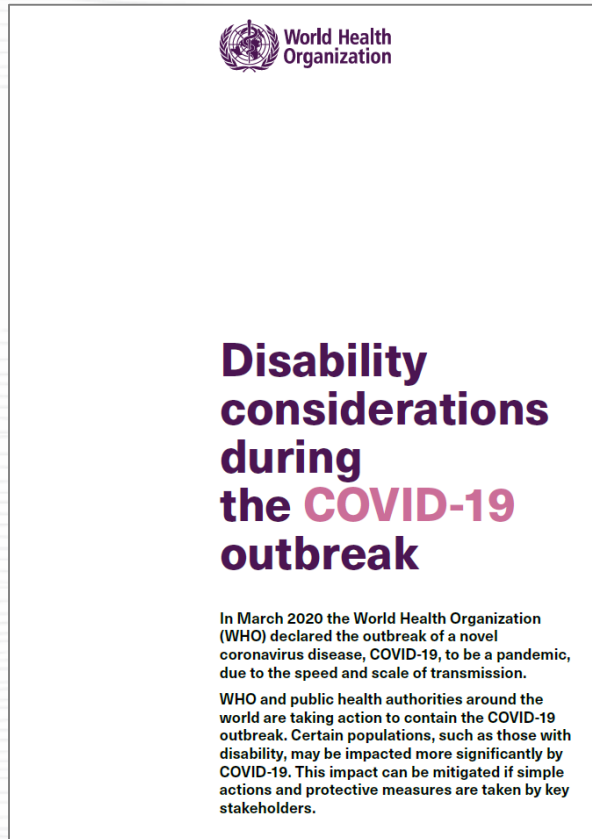
-  **Wash your hands often** with soap and water and regularly clean and disinfect surfaces.
-  **Keep taking your normal medication and follow medical advice.**
-  **Adopt a healthy lifestyle to help your immune system**: eat nutritious foods, get enough sleep, don't smoke, stay active and limit alcohol use.
-  **Maintain a distance of at least 1 meter and avoid physical contact** (handshakes, hugs, etc.) with other people.
-  **If COVID-19 is spreading in your community**, stay home as much as possible. **Avoid going to church and other places with a lot of people.**
-  **Make sure you have at least a month's supply of medicines** in case you need to stay home. Plan on how to get more in case you need to stay at home longer.
-  **Stay in close contact with your family, friends, or neighbors** and make a plan on how you'll seek food and medical care if needed.
-  **Familiarize yourself with COVID-19 symptoms**, like fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, so you can quickly identify them if they appear.
-  **If you show flu-like symptoms, call the assigned phone number in your country or your health care provider immediately.**
-  **Don't feel lonely. Stay in touch with family and friends by phone, video chat, or email.**

\*Adults over the age of 60 and immunocompromised people or those with underlying conditions, like high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and/or lung and heart diseases are more at risk.

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# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: RESOURCES



<https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/disability-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>



## Recording available from:

<https://www.paho.org/en/events/webinar-recommendations-inclusion-persons-disabilities-response-covid-19>



## CHILDREN: KEY MESSAGES



- Encourage **active listening** and an **understanding attitude** with the children.
- Help children find **positive ways to express disturbing feelings** such as anger, fear and sadness. Every child has his/her own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing and drawing can facilitate this process.
- Encourage **an increased sensitive and caring environment** around the child.
- Remember that **children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives**. It's important that adults manage their own emotions well and remain calm, listen to children's concerns and speak kindly to them and reassure them.
- Keep **regular routines** and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including **learning, playing** and **relaxing**. If possible, maintain schoolwork, study or other routine activities.
- Provide **facts about what is going on and give clear child-friendly information** about how to reduce risk of infection and stay safe in words they can understand. Demonstrate to children how they can keep themselves safe (e.g., show them effective handwashing).

# CHILDREN: RESOURCES



## TIPS FOR HEALTHY PARENTING

- One-on-one Time
- Keeping it Positive
- Structure Up
- Keep Calm and Manage Stress
- Talking about COVID-19

### 1 COVID-19 PARENTING One-on-One Time

Can't go to work? Schools closed? Worried about money? It is normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed.

School shutdown is also a chance to make better relationships with our children and teenagers. One-on-One time is free and fun. It makes children feel loved and secure, and shows them that they are important.

#### Set aside time to spend with each child

It can be for just 20 minutes, or longer – it's up to us. It can be at the same time each day so children or teenagers can look forward to it.

#### Ask your child what they would like to do

Choosing builds their self confidence. If they want to do something that isn't OK with physical distancing, then this is a chance to talk with them about this. (see next leaflet)

#### Ideas with your baby/toddler

- Copy their facial expression and sounds
- Sing songs, make music with pots and spoons
- Stack cups or blocks
- Tell a story, read a book, or share pictures

#### Ideas with your teenager

- Talk about something they like: sports, music, celebrities, friends
- Cook a favorite meal together
- Exercise together to their favorite music

#### Ideas with your young child

- Read a book or look at pictures
- Make drawings with crayons or pencils
- Dance to music or sing songs
- Do a chore together – make cleaning and cooking a game
- Help with school work

#### Switch off the TV and phone. This is virus-free time

**Listen to them, look at them. Give them your full attention. Have fun!**

For more information click below links.

Parenting tips from WHO    Parenting tips from UNICEF    In worldwide languages    EVIDENCE-BASE

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

## CHILDREN: RESOURCES



My Hero is You

how kids can  
fight COVID-19!



**IASC**  
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/my-hero-you>



# ADULTS IN ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE: KEY MESSAGES



- Try as much as possible to **keep to your personal daily routines or create new ones**. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, maintain regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective and use IT to connect with loved ones.
- If health authorities have recommended limiting your physical contact to contain the outbreak, you can still **stay socially connected** via e-mail, social media, video conferencing and telephone.