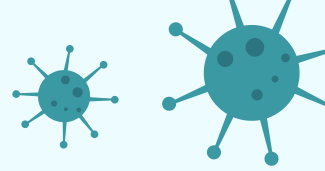


The Effects of Coronavirus Disease 2019 on Mental Health and Recommendations on How to Handle



Hong Kong is currently being threatened by the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Many people are worried that they or their families could become infected and therefore feel unsettled, anxious and stressed. These are normal psychological and emotional reactions when we feel threatened. While these feelings may disrupt our daily life, they can also help us become more vigilant and motivate us to take action and protect our health.

Under the threat of an outbreak, it is normal to experience stress reactions (such as rapid breathing, increased heart rate, muscle tension, dry mouth, abdominal discomfort, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, overly focused on “bad news” and biased thinking) and negative emotions (such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, guilt, anger, and dissatisfaction). It is also understandable that we may become more likely to distrust or blame others.

Here are some recommendations that may help us handle negative emotions and psychological stress:

We should avoid:

- Self-blame, self-isolate, give up on ourselves or stop taking health protection measures
- Constantly browsing or forwarding unsettling information (especially those that are unsubstantiated)
- Thoughts that led you to a blind alley, over-catastrophize, and increase panic (such as thinking you're infected just because you forgot to wear a mask, or thinking the outbreak has reached your neighborhood just because you saw someone coughing on the street)
- Blaming others and causing unnecessary conflict (such as blaming those who are sick for infecting others, blaming family members for making honest mistakes, blaming others for rushing to buy supplies or blaming shop keepers for not having supplies)
- Hiding problem from your family or medical personnel

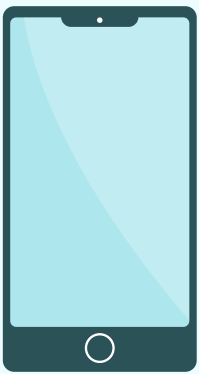
We can:

- Acknowledge and accept our reaction to stress, do not repress or deny having negative emotions
- Protect ourselves and take preventative measures (such as frequently wash hands and wear mask when going out)
- Practice self-care to stay healthy. Keeping a balanced diet, exercising regularly, having sufficient sleep and rest, as well as having a relaxed mood could help boost our body's immunity and defend against potential infections
- Stay rational when getting news updates of the outbreak, check the credibility of information sources, avoid following herd mentality and fall for exaggerated messages; we can pick a certain time and duration to read disease related news, and also pay attention to positive news.
- Regularly get in touch with family and friends, receive support from others and offer your support in return (communication can be done with phone calls, video messaging, etc., useful supplies can be shared and care can be expressed)
- Spend time wisely and do something meaningful (such as exercise, read books, watch movies, or engage in hobbies when appropriate)
- Practice relaxation exercises to relax the body and mind
- Establish positive thoughts and perspectives when viewing our experience in the outbreak (for example, knowing that we can take effective measures to protect ourselves, our family and other people; knowing that the outbreak is only temporary not forever; thankful that we are still healthy and someone cares about us; think about how we could get along with our loved ones in the future).





If emotional distress has persisted for two weeks or longer, please seek professional help.



If you need help for emotional distress, you may inquire:

- Centre for Health Protection Mental Health Infostation
https://www.chp.gov.hk/mhi/index_en.html
- Hospital Authority Mental Health Direct (24 hours) 2466 7350
- Social Welfare Department Hotline 2343 2255

To get more updates on COVID-19 and read the newest health guidelines, please visit:

- Centre for Health Protection COVID-19 Website
<http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/>

