National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI HelpLine
Monday-Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., EST
(800) 950-6264

COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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I'm having a lot of anxiety because of the coronavirus. Please help.

We get it. It's hard to sift through the messages and information coming at us. Worse, the "unknown unknown" (not knowing what you don't even know) can cause even greater anxiety for those of us who are panic-prone.

What you can do

1. Remember that knowledge is power. Understanding the factors that affect a person's immune response to COVID-19 will matter as much as, or more than, understanding the virus! Poor lung health caused by smoking, lack of adequate health care, suppressed immune systems, and/or populations particularly susceptible to infectious diseases, such as the elderly, have been particularly affected by COVID-19.

2. Don't accept everything you read or hear. Look beyond rhetoric and arm yourself with information. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information and frequent updates on the COVID-19's spread, severity, risk assessment, etc. To subscribe to the CDC's email and text message service, visit CDC Subscription Service.

3. Get your emotional support system in place:
    - Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible; take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies: rest during work or between shifts, eat healthy food and engage in physical activity.
    - Stay connected with others and maintain your social networks:
        - Have the emails and phone numbers of close friends and family at your fingertips.
        - Stay connected via email, social media, video conference and telephone.
    - Find a free online support group (see page 3 for a list of options).
    - Reach out to your local NAMI Affiliate or State Organization for information on support programs in your area.
    - Visit the NAMI Resource Library, which provides an extensive list of in-person and online support groups, and other mental health resources.
    - Contact the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline **(800) 985-5990** that provides 24/7, 365-day-a- year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.
    - Have the number of several Warmlines (emotional support hotlines) at your fingertips.
    - Call the NAMI HelpLine at **800-950-NAMI (6264)** Monday through Friday, between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm EST for mental health resources.

- National Mental Health Consumer's Self-Help Clearinghouse is a nationwide directory to locate local consumer-driven mental health services, including resources such as Clubhouses, crisis prevention/respite services, drop-in Centers, employment resources, housing, peer case management and support. The website maintains search function for directory of local CDS (consumer-driven services).

4. Take control and incorporate preventative measures
    - Wash your hands. See the CDC's list of preventative measures.
    - Avoid watching, reading or listening to news reports that cause you to feel anxious or distressed. A near-constant stream of news reports can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Instead, seek CDC updates and practical guidelines at specific times during the day.
    - Be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.

I'm quarantined or working from home – lonely and isolated even further – what can I do?

What you can do while working from home

- To help overcome uncertainty, normality and routine that mirrors life's daily patterns and practices can be helpful. If working from home, we encourage you to create a structured, dedicated work environment and build in self-care as well as daily benchmarks of achievement.

- Structure and routine may be helpful for people with mental health vulnerabilities, especially during times of uncertainty. We encourage you to maintain a regular routine with the work hours that are usually worked, including keeping up with morning rituals. Dressing in regular work attire and taking regular breaks, including lunch time, may also be helpful.

- Research tells us that seven percent of communication is accomplished through our words, including email. 38 percent is voice and a staggering 55 percent is body language and visual. For people with mental health vulnerabilities, and even for those with extroverted personalities, the lack of face time can be challenging. Using technology to simulate this can offer a solution to bridging this gap. Be mindful of opportunities to integrate video into your conversations with colleagues. Consider using the video function on Skype or Teams for internal and external meetings.

What you can do to get support
Also, there are numerous **online** support communities and emotional support **hotlines** to help you if you are quarantined:

Building Resilience

- Visit the CDC's page on Stigma and Resilience that discusses COVID-19's impact on mental health, and how we can reject stigma and build resilience during this time.

- American Psychological Association offers an excellent online resource called the "Road to Resilience," a step-by-step guide that helps individuals develop a personal strategy for enhancing resilience.

Finding Phone Support
A warmline is a confidential, non-crisis emotional support telephone hotline staffed by peer volunteers who are in recovery. Callers will find an empathetic listener to talk through their feelings. To find a warmline that serves your area, visit the NAMI HelpLine Warmline Directory on the NAMI Resource Library page.

Finding Online Support Communities

- NAMI hosts online communities where people exchange support and encouragement. These Discussion Groups can easily be joined by visiting www.nami.org.

- 7 Cups: www.7cups.com
  - *Free **online text chat** with a trained listener for emotional support and counseling. Also offers fee- for-service online therapy with a licensed mental health professional. Service/website also offered in Spanish.*

- Emotions Anonymous**:** www.emotionsanonymous.org
  - *An international fellowship of people who desire to have a better sense of emotional well-being. EA members have **in person** and **online weekly meetings** available in more than 30 countries with 600 active groups worldwide. The EA is nonprofessional and can be a complement to therapy.*

- Support Group Central: www.supportgroupscentral.com
  - *Offers **virtual support groups** on numerous mental health conditions - free or low-cost. Website also offered in Spanish.*

- TheTribe Wellness Community: www.support.therapytribe.com
  - *Free, **online peer support groups** offering members facing mental health challenges and/or difficult family dynamics a safe place to connect. Support groups include Addiction, Anxiety, Depression, HIV/AIDS, LGBT, Marriage/Family, OCD and Teens.*

- SupportGroups.com: https://online.supportgroups.com/
  - *Website featuring 200+ **online support groups**.*

- For Like Minds: www.forlikeminds.com
  - ***Online mental health support network** that allows for individuals to connect with others who are living with or supporting someone with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and stressful life events.*

- 18percent: www.18percent.org
  - *Offers a free, peer-to-peer **online support community** for those struggling with a wide range of mental health issues.*

- Psych Central: www.psychcentral.com
  - *Offers online mental health resources, quizzes, news, an "Ask the Therapist" function, and **online support communities.***

I don't have health insurance or a regular doctor – how can I get care?

Having health insurance is essential for people with mental health conditions to get the right care at the right time. We recommend you buy safely by going to www.healthcare.gov to see if you qualify for affordable options:

- All health plans offered through HealthCare.gov must cover mental health and substance use services at the same level as other health conditions.
- Even if open enrollment is over for the year, healthcare.gov will see if you can enroll in commercial insurance because of certain qualifications. It will also see if you qualify for Medicaid, which you can enroll in at any time.

When evaluating health plan options, consider these four things:

- **Affordability.** Compare not only monthly premiums, but also deductibles, co-pays and/or co-insurance, which affect your costs if you use services;
- **Availability of health professionals.** Check to see if your mental health professional(s) and other health care providers are in a health plan's network. If they are not, find out if the insurance plan will pay for out-of-network providers—and how much they will cover;
- **Coverage of prescription medications.** Find a plan that covers any medication(s) you need to maintain your wellness; and

- **Limits on mental health office visits.** Check to see if a plan has limits on office visits. Also consider differences in inpatient and outpatient coverage.

If you can't get insurance or need treatment right away:

In an emergency, all emergency departments that participate in Medicare (which is most hospitals in the United States) **must** see you, regardless of your ability to pay.

Federally funded health centers provide care regardless of insurance coverage or income. Many of these centers include mental health services. Find a federally funded health center near you at https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/.

National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics at https://www.nafcclinics.org/ offers a Find A Clinic function on its website.

For resources on medical/non-mental health (children's health care, dental care, eye care, women's health), the Free Clinic Directory at https://freeclinicdirectory.org/ offers a free clinic treatment locater by zip code.

Helpwhenyouneedit.org and www.211.org allow you to conduct a zip-code-based search for local resources including affordable medical and mental health clinics, housing, food, heating assistance, etc. In many places, you can also dial 211 from your phone to access information on local resources.

What if I'm quarantined and can't get my medication? Will there be a shortage?

You can ask your health care provider about getting a 90-day supply vs. a 60- or 30-day supply. If this is not possible, or if health care providers deny/decline making accommodations, challenge the decisions at least three times. Decision-makers on making health plan adjustments may change if/as conditions worsen.

Keep in mind that many cold/flu medications should not be taken along with antipsychotics and/or antidepressants. Please consult your pharmacist or prescribing health care professional for any potential medication contraindications.

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My business is suffering as a result of the Coronavirus. What assistance programs are available to help?

Contact your state's department of Public Health or Small Business Services website for local programs that may be set up to provide financial assistance to small businesses impacted by COVID-19. In some areas, businesses may qualify for low-interest loans and employee retention grants.

General financial assistance

- Need Help Paying Bills: www.needhelppayingbills.com
  - *Provides information on assistance programs, charity organizations, and resources that provide help paying bills, mortgage and debt relief (financial, rent and government assistance).*

- Aunt Bertha: www.auntbertha.com
  - *An online resource that connects users to free and reduced cost local resources such as medical care, food, housing, transportation and much more. Website also offered in Spanish.*

- 211 / www.211.org
  - *Dial 211 from any phone (mobile or landline) or visit www.211.org to search for contact information by zip code; service refers callers to appropriate agencies/community organizations that offer emergency financial assistance; available in most areas. Website also offered in Spanish.*

- HelpWhenYouNeedIt: www.helpwhenyouneedit.org
  - *An online service that connects users to over 350,000 listings nationwide of private and public resources for food pantries, stores that accept food stamps, assisted living facilities, domestic violence and homeless shelters, mental health & substance use treatment, free clinics, legal and financial assistance.*

- Help with Bills: www.usa.gov/help-with-bills
  - *Provides information about government programs that help with bill payment, temporary assistance, jobs/unemployment, credit, etc. Website and Helpline also offered in Spanish.*

Medical care / Hospital bills

- The Assistance Fund: www.tafcares.org
    - For those who qualify for financial support, service provides patient advocates to assist in securing financial assistance for co-payments, prescriptions, deductibles, premiums and medical expenses. Spanish-language translation service also available.

- Rise Above the Disorder: www.youarerad.org
    - *Connects users with resources for finding a therapist, answering mental health questions and applying for grants to cover the cost of therapy.*

- Patient Access Network Foundation (PAN): www.panfoundation.org
    - *Provides underinsured patients with financial assistance through disease-specific funds that provide access to progressive therapies. Spanish-language calls accepted.*

- Patient Advocate Foundation: www.patientadvocate.org
    - *Helps federally and commercially insured people living with life-threatening, chronic, and rare diseases. Offers co-pay relief program to provide direct financial assistance to insured patients who meet certain qualifications to help them pay for needed prescriptions and/or treatment. Their website also has many other resources and services. Website also offered in Spanish.*

- HealthWell Foundation: www.healthwellfoundation.org
    - *Provides financial assistance for underinsured to afford critical medical treatments through "Disease Funds" (note, typically for chronic physical diseases - not mental health conditions). Website also offered in Spanish.*

Prescription Medication

- NAMI Getting Help Paying for Medications page: https://www.nami.org/find-support/living-with-a- mental-health-condition/getting-help-paying-for-medications

- PhRMA's Medicine Assistance Tool: www.medicineassistancetool.org
    - *A search engine for many of the patient assistance resources that the pharmaceutical industry offers.*

- Needy Meds: (800) 503-6897 / www.needymeds.org
  - *Offers a HelpLine and website information on financial assistance programs to help defray cost of medication. Website also offered in Spanish.*

- RX Assist: www.rxassist.org
  - *Provides up-to-date directory of free and low-cost medicine programs and other ways to manage medication costs.*

- RX Hope: www.rxhope.com
  - *A free patient assistance program to assist people in need obtain critical medications.*

- USARX: www.usarx.com
  - *Provides coupons online for downloading/printing and can be brought to the pharmacy to see if it will give consumer a lower price or beat their copay.*

- Blinkhealth Prescription Assistance: www.blinkhealth.com
  - *Individuals (with or without insurance) pay upfront for medication online and then take a voucher to their pharmacy. Accepts calls 8 a.m.-10 p.m. M-F, 9 a.m.-7p.m. weekends (EST); Spanish language option on patient assistance line.*

Are people who have a mental illness at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19?

This is inconclusive. While laboratory studies have shown that healthy mice had a reduced immunosuppressant response to the antipsychotic medication, Risperidone, this data has not been proven in studies on humans. **A greater risk is having a mental health setback by stopping or changing medications than catching COVID-19.**

Is there a vaccine or cure for COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Self-neglect or poor personal hygiene are common signs or symptoms of serious mental illness and pose a greater risk of exposure to germs and their spread.

What you can do
The CDC recommends the following everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases.

Personal hygiene:

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds,** especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Note – the CDC does **not** recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

Travel/contact with others:

- If you are sick, please stay home and seek attention from your health care provider. Do not return to work until your health care provider has told you that you can do so.
- If you have been instructed by a public health official or a health care provider to stay home because a member of your household is sick with respiratory diseases symptoms, please do so.
- Reassess any travel plans you have in the coming months, assess your own risks and of your loved ones, and make decisions consistent with what you think is best regarding travel, and/or contact with others/crowds.

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I lost a loved one to Coronavirus. Where can I find support?

Many grief support services are offered through organizations at the community level. A good place to start is to contact your local NAMI Affiliate. To find your nearest NAMI Affiliate, click on your state through the Find Your Local NAMI menu. Additional options include:

- Most local hospices offer free or sliding scale grief therapy or can refer individuals to grief support in their area. The National Hospice and Palliative Care Association maintains a list of hospices across the country.

- Grief Share hosts free, in-person grief recovery support groups across the country.

- PersonalGriefCoach.net is a website that acts as a portal linking people who are grieving after a death by suicide to an extensive online directory of resources and information to help them cope with their loss, including a link to suicide bereavement support groups directory.

I'm a smoker. Am I more likely to catch COVID-19? What should I do?

Due to weakened respiratory systems, smoking increases the severity of diseases such as influenza and MERS (another coronavirus). COVID-19 is a disease that mostly affects the lungs. Also, individuals who are chronically exposed to second-hand smoke may also be vulnerable to respiratory infections.

What you can do:
If you are a smoker, consider quitting smoking immediately. Consult your doctor about smoking cessation programs or over-the-counter aids like nicotine gum or patches, which can be purchased at most pharmacies without a prescription. Additionally, Quitline.org is a website that contains links to nationwide Smoking Cessation Programs, information on How to Quit Smoking for Free, Quit Smoking Free Patches and more.

How does homelessness increase risk of contracting COVID-19?

People with mental illness can experience times of homelessness, which places them at greater risk. People living outdoors often do so in close quarters and lack the ability to maintain basic hygiene, including precautions such as hand washing.

They may also face more danger from serious infection because of existing illnesses or frequent use of drugs or alcohol — factors with the potential to make a case of COVID-19 more severe. And, since some homeless people also move often, it makes it harder to reach them for treatment and potentially increases the spread of the virus if they are carriers. Finally, sustained exposure to the elements and living among a population with similar challenges can weaken the immune system. It also reduces the likelihood of access to medical care necessary for early detection and treatment.

What you can do:

- For immediate and emergency housing, the online Homeless Shelter Directory provides information on homeless shelters and other social services throughout the country.
- Consult www.211.org or dial 211 from any cell or landline for a list of shelters in your area.
- National Mental Health Consumer's Self-Help Clearinghouse is a nationwide directory to locate local consumer-driven services, including housing. The website maintains search function for directory of local CDS (consumer-driven services).
- See section above regarding finding affordable/free medical clinics in your area.

My loved one is incarcerated, are they at increased risk for exposure to COVID-19?

The lack of sufficient, community-based treatment options has resulted in the drastic increase in the incarceration of the people with mental illness. Further, people in the U.S. are incarcerated at a rate of about one million times per month, and the number of staff who go to work and families who visit these places is even greater. (The same goes for courts, where judges, defense attorneys and prosecutors may limit court services or even close courts.) Also, prisons and jails generally house people based on several types of security classifications, and when people are confined to a housing area of a jail or prison, there will be a tendency to keep them there, without the services they are entitled to.

What you can do
Incarcerated people have Constitutional protections under the Eighth Amendment, including the right to medical care/attention as needed to treat both short-term conditions and long-term illnesses. The medical care provided must be "adequate." Communication with jail/prison administration is key and should start early by those who are incarcerated and/or their families.

If an incarcerated loved one is not receiving adequate care, families and caregivers may be their best advocate:

- Contact the medical staff at the facility (note: contact may be limited/difficult due to confidentiality regulations.)

- If a family member is permitted to bring medication to the jail (dependent on jail policy), bring the individual's current medications and all relevant records to the facility. Be sure the medication is in the original pharmaceutical packaging with dispensing instructions.
- If your loved one is being denied treatment:
  - File a formal complaint directly with the facility in question.
  - Contact the state's Department of Corrections office is the issue remains unresolved.
  - Contact your state's Governor.
  - Contact your state's protection and advocacy agency, which is responsible for protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities.
  - You can also contact your state's affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).
  - Consult the American Bar Association's Find Legal Help search function where you can locate the legal referral service for your area.

I'm the aging parent of an adult child living with a serious mental illness. I want to be sure they are taken care of.

What you can do
Visit the NAMI Online Knowledge Center to learn about Creating a Long-term Care Plan for a Loved One Living with a Serious Mental Illness