

LOUISIANA ADDICTION RESEARCH CENTER, GUIDANCE FOR POLICYMAKERS
**DETERMINING THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
ON SUBSTANCE USE PATTERNS: AUGUST 31, 2020**

Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Executive Director

**COVID-19 AND ADDICTION ARE
INTERTWINED EPIDEMICS**

As has been previously described by the Louisiana Addiction Research Center, Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) addressed the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to drug addiction^{1,2}, and important take-home messages from her message are:

- Patients have expressed **difficulty in obtaining access to adequate treatment.**
- Persons who are **isolated** and **stressed**—as much of the population is (and has been) during this pandemic—often turn to drugs or alcohol to alleviate their negative feelings and/or “escape”.
- **Social support is crucial** for persons—especially those in recovery—and **social isolation is a risk factor for relapse.** Thus, those in recovery may face additional stresses and heightened urges to use substances and will be at a greatly increased risk for relapse.

Additionally, it is possible that drug and alcohol use during the pandemic is increasing due to boredom and/or the incorrect perception that it is “safe” because the individual is already home.

Nevertheless, as the rates of substance use and abuse increase, it is likely there will also be observed increases in overdoses.³

As stay-at-home directives are being lifted and more bars/restaurants are reopening to the public, in addition to taking appropriate measures to stay safe from the coronavirus, it is also important to engage in other healthy behaviors (such as resisting the urge to binge drink).

Additionally, the Louisiana Addiction Research Center recently described how the coronavirus has disrupted the global supply of many drugs of abuse (including opioids and stimulants) due to disruptions in international trade and/or shortages in synthesis precursors.⁴

Thus, it is feasible that the drugs that are being used during the pandemic may differ from those typically used in Louisiana. With a rise in the use of new substances, it is also likely that there will be an increase in associated serious adverse events.

NEEDED NOW

- **Develop strategies to identify vulnerable and at-risk populations**
- **Determine ways to connect with individuals engaging in increased drug and/or alcohol use while at home**
- **Develop and share at-home stress-and/or isolation-coping strategies**

*Please direct all questions, comments and other responses to Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Head of Pharmacology, Toxicology & Neuroscience (LSU Health Shreveport) and Executive Director of the Louisiana Addiction Research Center:
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- 4- <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-04-24/wuhan-china-coronavirus-fentanyl-global-drug-trade>