



## Your Mental Health & Coronavirus

### An information sheet for supporters and the community

#### What is a novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). *Novel* coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The virus causes the respiratory disease known as COVID-19 (COronaVIrus Disease 2019). Symptoms include fever, coughing, a sore throat and shortness of breath.

#### What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The common signs include a fever (37.3°C or higher), cough, sore throat, fatigue, or shortness of breath.

**If you have any of these symptoms, phone your doctor or state health service immediately and seek advice.**

#### What can I do to protect myself?

There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and others from infection:

- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid contact with anyone who has symptoms such as fever, a cough, sore throat, fatigue, and shortness of breath.
- If you have to go out to buy groceries or medicine, stay at least 1.5 metres away from others, and especially anyone who has symptoms.
- Stay home and follow the advice of authorities.

#### How can I protect my mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic?

It's normal to feel anxious and concerned in response to a situation like this. It affects all of us differently, and those who might be struggling could be more vulnerable to mental illness right now. We need to protect our own mental health and theirs, as best we can.

- If you are in self-isolation or quarantine, remind yourself that this won't last forever, it's temporary.
- Reassure yourself that by self-isolating, you are doing the right thing by others.
- Whether you are in self-isolation or not, maintain a daily routine as much as possible.
- Stay connected with workmates, friends, and family via social media, email, phone, and by keeping a safe physical distance if you are still at work or buying groceries or medication.
- Join online communities such as PCFA's Online Community.
- If you are working from home, take regular breaks, set up a comfortable workspace, and try not to work during your personal time.
- Be self-aware – if the news or social media makes you feel anxious or distressed, switch off or cut back to protect your well-being – seek safe updates from others if you need to.

#### When should I seek professional support?

If you experience any of the following symptoms, contact your doctor to ask about a mental health treatment plan and access to free counselling services, and confide in someone you trust to ask for their support:

- Finding it difficult to participate in normal daily activities.
- Loss of hope or interest in the future.
- Experiencing an overwhelming sense of fear or sadness that is severe and won't go away.

#### What else can I do to improve my mental health and boost my immunity?

If you are a smoker, quit immediately. Maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet, avoid or minimise alcohol consumption, keep a healthy weight, and ensure you get enough sleep and daily physical activity.



## What should I tell children and young people?

Be factual, open, and optimistic, but sensitive to the child's age and understanding, avoiding sensationalism and dread.

While it may be hard, look for the silver lining – NAPLAN has been cancelled – hurrah!

Ask the child if they have any questions and let them know they can talk to you about it. Reassure them that it's normal to feel concerned, and let them know that you feel the same way.

Monitor their exposure to news and media and provide creative and educational distractions or physical activities to keep their minds occupied.

Check out [this video](#) on talking to children about scary stuff in the news if you need more tips.

## I'm working on the frontline as a nurse / cleaner / grocery provider / health worker / medical specialist – what can I do to protect my mental health?

First of all – **THANK YOU** – you're a hero for doing what you're doing right now. Try as much as possible to get enough sleep between shifts, eat well and try to maintain recreational physical activity, and ensure you debrief with someone you trust about what you are going through.

Ask your friends, family, and workmates to provide practical and emotional support as necessary, recognising that all of us will respond differently and have different needs. Keep talking about how you feel and always reach out.

## What other support is available?

You can call on the following national support services for help:

- Cancer Counselling  
13 11 20
- Beyond Blue  
1300 22 4636  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- Lifeline Australia  
13 11 14  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Lived Experience Telephone Support Service (LETSS)  
A peer-based mental health support line (5pm – 11:30 pm)  
1800 013 755  
[www.letss.org.au](http://www.letss.org.au)
- Youth Beyond Blue  
1300 224 636
- eheadspace  
1800 650 890

## If you need support, we're here to help!

There is still much we don't know about COVID-19 and the impact it will have on our community.

It is clear, however, that men living with prostate cancer and their families will be especially vulnerable to the effects of this pandemic. Please [donate](#) today to keep our work alive and [call us on 1800 22 00 99](tel:1800220099) for help or email [enquiries@pcfa.org.au](mailto:enquiries@pcfa.org.au).