

# SUPPORTING CORRECTIONS STAFF DURING COVID-19

Working in a corrections facility, there are risks you take every single day, just by showing up to do your job. We also recognize the increased risk and burden placed upon you and your families during the COVID-19 crisis. Working within a correctional environment is rewarding, but also challenging. Your duty to serve can put your own personal safety at risk, and that is a stress most will never understand. We thank you for showing up day after day, while the rest of the community must remain at home. We thank you for your bravery and dedication to serving others every day, and especially during this crisis.

The intention of this kit is to provide resources to help preserve your own resilience and mental health, as well as that of your family. Additionally, it strives to highlight areas you can monitor for yourself and your peers during this crisis, in order to seek help early in coping with the unique stress you experience. Given the unique challenges of the role of a staff person working within correctional settings, it is important to monitor any increased levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia and stress. If you have those feelings, there is nothing to be ashamed of and you are not alone, as others experience them as well. Also, there are resources to help you get through them.



## First – Be safe!

The best way to prevent the spread of illness is to **stay home when you are sick**. For all persons working in correctional settings you could have direct contact with sick and otherwise vulnerable populations. Screening staff when they report for duty reduces the risk to all those you may contact as well as your fellow correctional employees.

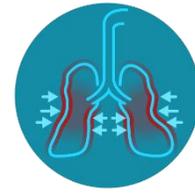
**Every staff member working in a correctional setting, every shift.** Answer three simple questions when you report for duty:



Do you have a cough?



Do you have a fever?



Are you short of breath?

If you are experiencing symptoms, feel ill, or develop a fever – **stay home** and contact your healthcare provider and speak to your employer about access to testing. Make appropriate contact with your correctional employer to plan for shift coverage, consistent with your agency COVID-19 plan. Remember, taking precautions to protect yourself at work also helps protect your family and coworkers. If you have concerns, make sure to check in with managers, administration and other staff to address problems as a team.

## Have A Plan In Case You Become Ill

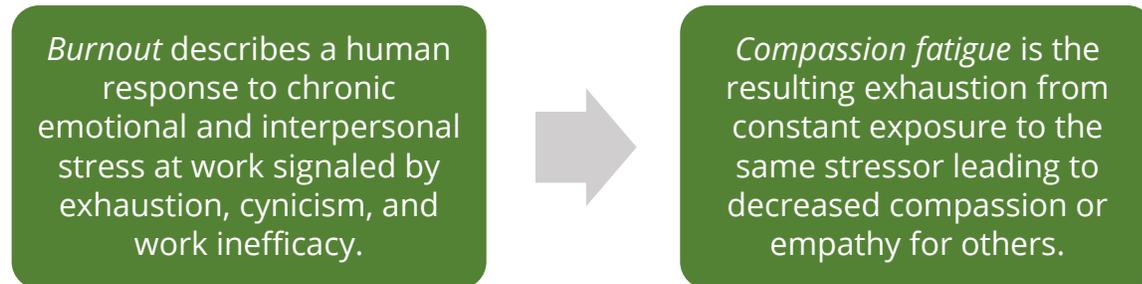
You can help manage anxiety about COVID-19 by **creating a plan** in case you, or someone in your household, becomes ill. Just like fire and tornado drills, it is better to be prepared than to be caught off guard. Involve your family; by participating in the plan, your family might not feel as overwhelmed or as if they do not have power in the situation.

Use the MDHHS guide, “Preparing yourself for and preventing COVID-19” to start a household plan for COVID-19:

[michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/Prevent\\_and\\_Prepare\\_Final\\_687282\\_7.pdf](https://michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/Prevent_and_Prepare_Final_687282_7.pdf)

## Recognize When You Need A Break

The fact that COVID-19 is human-to-human transmissible, new, relatively unknown, and potentially fatal may intensify the feelings of personal danger. It is important to understand types of stress so that you can recognize them in yourself and in others.



Resilience is the ability to adapt successfully in the face of trauma, adversity, tragedy or significant threat. Creating a stress resilience plan helps you fight against burnout and compassion fatigue.

### Create a Stress Resilience Plan

- 1**  
Self-Assess
  - What are my early warning signs of excessive stress?
  - What do I do currently daily for self-care?
  - What do I do on a weekly basis to improve self-care?
  - What do I do when my stress level is unusually high?
  
- 2**  
Plan for the Future
  - What can I add to my self-care routine?
  - How will I make time for these new strategies?
  - How often should I review what I am doing?
  - What challenges do I expect to have with my plan for change?
  - How will I know if my changes are helping?
  
- 3**  
Get Support
  - Who can I turn to for support with my plan within my correctional employment setting?
  - Who can I turn to for support with my plan in my personal life?
  - How often should I check in with them?
  - What professional support is available for me if I need it?

## Stay Healthy!

Persons working in correctional settings need to take care of their own health to maintain constant vigilance for their own safety. Staff in correctional settings must be able to stay focused on the job in the dynamic, changing crisis environment.

### **Pace Yourself**

- Pace yourself, this pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Watch out for each other. Coworkers may be intently focused on a particular task and not notice a hazard nearby.
- Be conscious of those around you. Law enforcement officers who are exhausted, stressed, or even temporarily distracted may place themselves and others at risk.
- Take frequent rest breaks. Mental fatigue, particularly over long shifts, can greatly increase emergency workers' risk of injury.
- Find a buddy – check in on one another regularly. Debrief after shifts, point out positive aspects of the shift when possible.

### **Prioritize Your Physical Health**

- Keep a healthy routine: even in the uncertain times that we face today, keeping a routine will help curb stress.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise when you are able. Simply taking 20 minutes and going for a walk can help manage stress.
- Whenever possible, take breaks away from the work area.

### **Don't Ignore Your Mental Health**

- Keep in touch with friends and family: A simple phone call, text message, or video chat helps to manage stress and keeps us in contact with those close and important to us.
- Limit media exposure: take some time every day to digitally unplug and get a break from all the media.
- Recognize and accept what you cannot change—the chain of command, organizational structure, waiting, equipment shortages, etc.
- Talk to people when you feel like it. You decide when you want to discuss your experience.
- Give yourself permission to feel upset or scared: you are in a difficult situation.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal—do not try to fight them. But if your sleep is so disrupted that it is hard to function, take time off and seek mental help.

# IDENTIFYING STRESS

## Physical

Staff experiencing any of the following symptoms should seek IMMEDIATE medical attention:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe pain
- Symptoms of shock

If symptoms become severe or develop over time, seek medical attention.

- Fatigue
- Nausea/vomiting
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Thirst
- Headaches
- Visual difficulties
- Clenching of jaw
- Nonspecific aches and pains

## Cognitive

If these symptoms occur at work, staff may not be able to stay clearly focused to maintain their own safety or to help patients in distress.

Staff may experience momentary cognitive symptoms; however, if symptoms are chronic or interfere with daily activities, medical attention should be sought. These symptoms include:

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Poor problem solving
- Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- Memory problems
- Nightmares

## Behavioral

As a result of a traumatic incident, staff may notice the following behavioral changes in themselves or coworkers:

- Intense anger
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outburst
- Temporary loss or increase of appetite
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Inability to rest, pacing
- Change in sexual functioning

## Emotional

Strong emotions are ordinary reactions to a traumatic or extraordinary situation. Staff should seek support from a mental health professional if distress continues for several weeks or interferes with daily activities. Emotional symptoms include:

- Anxiety or severe panic (rare)
- Guilt/sense of failure
- Denial or grief
- Fear
- Irritability
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Blaming others or self

# MANAGING STRESS

**Recognizing stress in yourself is important. Here are some things you can do for yourself to help you manage your stress:**

**Talk to your peers.** Individuals working in correctional settings have unique common experiences and know the importance of their peers in the workforce. Talk to peers about the stresses of the day, jobs, and other worries you share. Place an emphasis on validating one-another's concerns without focusing on the grim. Help point out positive elements of the shift or day for one another.

**Seek help from support systems** available in your correctional system and reach out to your healthcare provider or available call-in lines for support (several are provided in this kit). Many systems have point people and resources to help with burnout, fatigue and other concerns. Having conversations about your worries can help reduce anxiety.

**Self-care helps you stay strong** in order to better help others. Self-care can be eating healthy, exercising and getting good sleep. Self-care may also include taking care of family, including children and others. Making sure you fill your own cup is just as important as pouring from it to serve others.

**Stay in touch with older parents and family members** you would normally visit. Connect by phone or video chat, write letters, or send supplies safely to their residence to maintain your connectedness.

**Take things one day at a time** - step back from the "sprint" mentality and prepare for a marathon. Remember that this pandemic will not be solved quickly so pacing will be crucial.

**Take mindful minutes.** Slow breaths on the top of the hour, taking time to recognize all the small things around you, acknowledging them, and letting them go. Find mindfulness techniques you enjoy and do them regularly.

## National Disaster Distress Helpline



**Call**  
1-800-  
985-5990



**Text**  
TalkWithUs  
to 66746

## National Suicide Prevention Lifeline



**Call**  
1-800-  
273-8255



**Text**  
TALK  
to 741741

# Resources For Corrections Staff

## For Your Health

### Michigan Stay Well Counseling

Talking to a counselor can help you cope with feelings about how COVID-19 is impacting your life, job and routines. Michigan Stay Well counselors are free, confidential and available 24/7. Call 1-888-535-6136 and press option "8" to talk to a counselor.

### Emergency Chaplain Group

Emotional and spiritual support for first responders experiencing extraordinary human events daily. Phone: (855) 436-2427 or email: [em.office@emchap.org](mailto:em.office@emchap.org).

**Code Green** - [codegreencampaign.org](http://codegreencampaign.org)

**First Responders Suicide Prevention Resources Center** - [sprc.org/settings/first-responders](http://sprc.org/settings/first-responders)

**Institute for Responder Wellness** - [instituteforresponderwellness.com](http://instituteforresponderwellness.com)

**Wayne State University COVID-19 Crisis Hotline** – for frontline personnel (888) 910-1636 Monday – Saturday 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

## For Your Family

### Childcare for Essential Workers in Michigan

Executive Order 2020-16 expanded access to childcare for essential workers responding to COVID-19. Find access to childcare: [helpmegrow-mi.org/essential](http://helpmegrow-mi.org/essential)

**CSTS (Center for Study of Traumatic Stress) – Provider and Family Resources**  
[cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response](http://cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response)

## Specific to Corrections Settings

### Michigan Department of Corrections Wellness Unit

- Phone: 517-335-0570 or Toll Free: 833-DCBWELL (833-322-9355)
- Email: [mDOC-wellness@michigan.gov](mailto:mDOC-wellness@michigan.gov)
- Mail: MDOC Wellness Unit, PO Box 30003, Lansing, MI 48909

### American Correctional Association -

[aca.org/ACA\\_Prod\\_IMIS/ACA\\_Member/Healthcare\\_Professional\\_Interest\\_Section/Coronavirus\\_COVID.aspx](http://aca.org/ACA_Prod_IMIS/ACA_Member/Healthcare_Professional_Interest_Section/Coronavirus_COVID.aspx)

**National Sheriff's Association** - [sheriffs.org/coronavirus/health](http://sheriffs.org/coronavirus/health)

**NCCHC (National Commission on Correctional Healthcare)-** [ncchc.org/blog/covid-19-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know-in-corrections](http://ncchc.org/blog/covid-19-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know-in-corrections)