

# SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF THE HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE



As a healthcare worker, you may experience additional challenges during infectious disease outbreaks, including concerns about your own health and that of your family, stigma from within your communities, and managing the distress of patients.

We acknowledge the 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 this time. Your duty to serve puts you at increased risk of acquiring the virus and conflicts with your own safety, 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 highlights areas to monitor yourself and your peers in order to seek help early in coping with the unique stress you experience. Many front-line healthcare providers are experiencing increased levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia and stress. You are not alone in these feelings, and 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**. Healthcare workers have direct contact with sick and otherwise vulnerable populations. Screening staff when they report for duty reduces the risk to patients and others.

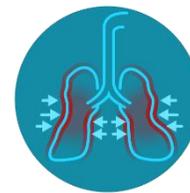
**Every healthcare worker, every shift.** Answer three simple questions when you report for duty:



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 employer for further direction regarding potential testing, isolation, and shift coverage, in accordance with their COVID-19 Plan. If you are in a solo practice or a group practice, identify a coverage plan in case you become ill so your patients know where to go.

# Have A Plan In Case You Become Ill

## **At work:**

Discuss what will happen if you become ill with COVID-19 with your manager, supervisor, or practice partners.

- Where and how will you isolate from your family to protect them? Does your provider have housing options for you to isolate?
- How will you be compensated during isolation?
- How long will your employer expect you to remain off duty? What is the policy for returning to work?
- Are there tasks you can do from home if you must isolate?

## **At home:**

Find ways to get your family involved in preventing the spread of illness in your home.

### *Prevent illness in your household:*

- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially when returning home from work. Set up a wash station with soap, towels, sanitizer, bleach solution, trash can, etc. to minimize spread.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces like doorknobs, counters, and phones.
- Teach your family best practices for hand washing, cough and sneeze hygiene, and surface cleaning.
- Designate a spot for your work items – deposit them there when you return home and immediately wash up.

### *Plan for illness in the household*

Healthcare workers have unique needs when it comes to planning for illness in the household. Discuss with your family what to do if you become ill, or if another family member becomes ill. By participating in the plan, your family might not feel as overwhelmed or as if they do not have power in the situation.

- Consider separate living spaces and bathrooms.
- Create a plan for childcare and pet care if you become ill.
- Identify where you will isolate (home or away from home) if you become ill.
- Discuss the possibility for schedule changes like: increased shifts, longer shifts, telework or travel to meet the needs of the COVID-19 response.

Download the Michigan Prepares Mobile App to help your family plan together: [Michigan.gov/MichiganPrepares](https://Michigan.gov/MichiganPrepares).

- Update your emergency contacts.
  - Fill out your emergency plan.
  - Review supply checklists.
- (Tip: you don't want to have to leave your house if you become ill.)

## Recognize When You Need A Break

The fact that COVID-19 is human-to-human transmissible, highly contagious, and potentially fatal for some patients, 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.

*Burnout* describes a human response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress at work signaled by exhaustion, cynicism, and work inefficacy.



*Compassion fatigue* is the resulting exhaustion from constant exposure to the same stressor leading to decreased compassion or empathy for 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 on a daily basis 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?
  - How often should I check in with them?
  - What professional support is available for me if I need it?

## Stay Healthy!

Healthcare workers need to take care of their own health to be able to provide care for patients in a high-stress environment. Workers must be able to stay focused on the job in the dynamic, 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 take appropriate precautions to protect themselves.
- Be conscious of those around you. Healthcare workers who are exhausted, stressed, or temporarily distracted may place themselves and others at risk.
- Take frequent rest breaks. Mental fatigue, particularly over long shifts, can greatly increase workers' risk of injury and burnout.

### **Prioritize Your Physical Health**

- Keep a healthy routine to 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.
- Find time for breaks away from your workspace or go outside for fresh air.

### **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 you in contact with those close and important to you.
- Limit media exposure: Take some time every day to digitally unplug and get a break from all the media. Allow yourself to be removed from the crisis.
- Recognize and accept what you cannot change such as the organizational structure, complex work environment, wait times, supply shortages, etc.
- Talk to people when you feel like it. You decide when you want to discuss your experience and on your terms.
- Identify a buddy, ideally a peer, who understands your unique stresses, and check in often with one another. Try to process the difficulties of each shift, be sure to point out positive elements too. Lift one another up!
- 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

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

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

If healthcare workers experience symptoms over time or if they become severe, workers should 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 on the scene, workers may not be able to stay clearly focused to maintain their own safety or to help patients in distress.

Healthcare workers may experience momentary cognitive symptoms; however, if symptoms are chronic or interfere with daily activities, workers should seek medical attention. 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, healthcare workers 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 situations. Health care workers should seek mental health support from a disaster mental health professional if distress continues for several weeks or if they interfere with daily activities. Emotional symptoms include:

- Anxiety or severe panic (rare)
- Guilt/sense of failure
- Denial
- 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** 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 the healthcare environment. Many systems have point people or resources to help with burnout, fatigue and other concerns. Conversations about your worries can help reduce anxiety. Check out the list of resources in this document as well.

**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. Remember that this pandemic will not be solved quickly, treat it like a marathon.

**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. Getting outside or stepping away from your workspace 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 Healthcare Workers

## 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: <https://www.helpmegrow-mi.org/essential>

## For Your Health

**EAP (Employee Assistance Programs)** - Ask your employer if you have an EAP for free, confidential assessments and short-term counseling for mental and emotional well-being. Many EAPs help with trauma and other emergency response situational.

### **Finding Better Sleep During COVID-19**

[https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS\\_FS\\_Fight\\_COVID19\\_w\\_Better\\_Sleep\\_Health.pdf](https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Fight_COVID19_w_Better_Sleep_Health.pdf)

**Headspace** - <https://www.headspace.com/health-covid-19>

Some people find apps on mindfulness, like Headspace, to be helpful. Free subscription to Headspace Plus through 2020 for Healthcare Providers.

- Quick sign up with an NPI number
- Providers without an NPI number – scroll down to the “Have Questions” section

## Compassion Fatigue Resources

- <http://championline.org/assets/files/ToolsProducts/OEResources/CF-Resources-Handout.pdf>
- <https://www.goodtherapy.org/for-professionals/business-management/human-resources/article/cost-of-caring-10-ways-to-prevent-compassion-fatigue>

## Additional Stress & Mental Health Resources

**CSTS (Center for Study of Traumatic Stress)** - Provider, Leader & Family Resources <https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response>

**NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)** - <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support>

**Taking Care of Ourselves During COVID** - <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/02/coronavirus-and-mental-health-taking-care-of-ourselves-during-infectious-disease-outbreaks>

**APA (American Psychological Association)** - <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/>

**American Psychiatric Association:**

- <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/02/coronavirus-and-mental-health-taking-care-of-ourselves-during-infectious-disease-outbreaks>

**For Leadership**

**Michigan Crisis Response Association** - <http://mcrainc.net/mcra-cism-team-registry>

- MCRA is a comprehensive and integrated response program designed to provide crisis intervention to those impacted by traumatic events.

**For Nurses**

**ENA** - COVID-19 Resources <https://www.ena.org/practice-resources/covid-19>

**For Physicians**

**AOA** - COVID-19 Resources for Physicians <https://osteopathic.org/practicing-medicine/providing-care/covid-19-resources/>

**AMA** - A Physicians Guide to COVID-19 <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/physicians-guide-covid-19>

**FSPHP** - Support of Clinicians during COVID-19 <https://www.fsphp.org/support-of-clinicians-during-covid-19>

**ACEP** - <https://www.acep.org/corona/COVID-19/>

**For Physicians Assistants**

**AAPA** - <https://www.aapa.org/news-central/covid-19-resource-center/>