

## **Coping with the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak**

The constant media and health organization alerts about the spread of the Novel Coronavirus in China have naturally caused great concern, first to those living and working in those areas, but also for those in North America, as the risk of infection has spread. People are becoming worried about the impact this situation may have on them, their families, their friends and their country. Fear that precautions to prevent the further spread of the virus might fail, are beginning to surface in the media and in our thoughts.

The first step to coping with stress and uncertainty is to understand the psychological impact it is having on us, on our children, and the people around us.

### **What to expect**

People will deal with uncertainty and stress in different ways. People differ in how they give meaning to events or the extent to which they expect it to influence life. Additionally, people differ in how they express emotion and feel accountable and responsible to family and friends. Despite these individual differences, it is common human experience to be impacted by extreme stress and threats to health and safety. Below are some normal reactions to such circumstances.

During times of high stress, it is perfectly natural to feel:

- Overwhelmed / shocked
- Frightened
- Anxious
- Distressed
- Worried
- Confused
- Helpless and powerless

All these reactions may express themselves in different ways, including:

- Anxiety about travelling to and from work, travelling within or outside the country
- Anxiety in the presence of unknown persons or when in a crowd
- Difficulty concentrating, attending to tasks
- Uncharacteristic changes in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Unusual irritation, agitation, heightened sense of alertness and jumpiness
- Preoccupation with the news
- Concerns relating to the safety of family members and friends
- Heightened emotions/increased sadness, irritability and anger
- A strong desire to be with friends and family
- A desire to implement strong rules and guidance to navigate the situation

## **In the workplace**

Everyone reacts differently to the threat of or an emerging crisis and this can affect workplace dynamics. The varied responses to the situation may cause:

- Increased inter-personal conflict
- A breakdown of co-worker communications
- Work team or group dynamics may improve or they may suffer – depending on the group dynamic and their individual response to the crisis situation
- Social distancing to avoid interaction and/or infection

Those who work in industries exposed to the public, for example public transportation, customer service, or in a health care setting, may experience heightened anxiety.

## **Managing your stress**

While we have no control over the Novel Coronavirus Virus epidemic in China, we do have control over how we manage our own reactions to the situation; these are times when we need to pay attention to how we manage our stress. As much as possible:

- Maintain family and work routines
- Eat a healthy diet and stay physically active
- Reach out to people close to you and, where possible, stay connected to family and friends abroad
- Limit exposure to media. Instead, monitor the situation through government websites for example, the Canadian or US government websites, the Center for Disease Control, or the World Health Organization
- Separate factual information from imagined fears
- Remember that your feelings may vary from day to day and may be different than the feelings and thoughts of those around you
- Set aside time every day for self-care and positive distraction. Do something that you enjoy and that brings you peace and calm, such a meditation, reading, listening to soothing music, reading to your children, watching a funny movie.
- Avoid relying on alcohol or other substances to help you cope
- Focus your attention on the things over which you have influence and control

## **The Benefits of Your Employee & Family Assistance Program**

Sometimes talking to a professional counsellor can help you deal with your reactions and maintain perspective. Your EFAP is a free and completely confidential service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**You can reach us anytime by calling**

**1 800 387 4765 or visiting [workhealthlife.com](http://workhealthlife.com)**

## Managing Your Health

### Avoiding cold and flu viruses

When you are at home or when you are travelling, you need to pay attention to basic prevention measures to avoid the flu. Cold and flu viruses spread from person to person in a variety of ways, including coughing; sneezing; and rubbing your eyes, mouth, or nose after touching an infected surface. Your risk of catching a virus may increase if you encounter someone who is sick.

**Make sure your flu vaccine is up to date.** Everyone over the age of 6 months needs the flu vaccine every year. The winter months in Canada have a higher incidence rate of the flu. If you are travelling, check the flu threat at your destination before you travel. Talk with your doctor if you have a health concern and want to travel to a place where outbreaks are occurring. If you will be away from home for a while, stay aware of the local flu situation. For more information and news on current outbreaks, visit the **Public Health Agency of Canada's** website.

**Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, which will lower the chance of passing flu germs into your system.

**Get medical attention if you have the flu.** Remember that flu can be dangerous and sometimes life threatening. Visit your family physician, local clinic or emergency room if you become ill with a virus. If you are travelling, contact the nearest Canadian Embassy if you have the flu and need medical attention.

**Remember to take care of yourself** whether you are at home or are away from home. Get enough sleep and eat balanced meals so you do not get over-tired or rundown. Good hygiene and virus avoidance techniques can keep you and your family healthy during flu season and during virus outbreaks.

### Resources You May Find Helpful

The Canadian government website on the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak and Your Health:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

The US Centre for Disease Control, including travel warnings:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The World Health Organization, Corona Virus Updates:

<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus>

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