

# COPING WITH STRESS DURING INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS

San Mateo County Health supports the wellbeing of our County family, friends and colleagues. When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal and may be more likely in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. During an infectious disease outbreak, care for your own physical and mental health and reach out in kindness to those affected by the situation.

## What You Can Do to Help Cope with Emotional Distress

### 1. MANAGE YOUR STRESS

- Stay informed. Refer to credible sources for updates on the local situation.
- Stay focused on your personal strengths.
- Maintain a routine.
- Make time to relax and rest.

### 2. BE INFORMED AND INFORM YOUR FAMILY

- Become familiar with local medical and mental health resources in your community. Attend community meetings for resources/education.
- Avoid sharing unconfirmed news about the infectious disease to avoid creating unnecessary fear and panic.
- Give honest age-appropriate information to children and remember to stay calm; children often feel what you feel.

### 3. CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

- Keep contact with family and friends.
- Join community and/or faith groups.
- Accept help from family, friends, co-workers and clergy.
- Reach out to neighbors and friends with special needs who may need your help.

### 4. REACH OUT AND HELP

- If you know someone affected by the outbreak, call them to see how they are doing, and remember to keep their confidentiality.
- Consider an act of kindness for those who have been asked to practice social distancing, such as having a meal delivered or offering to drop off homework at their doorstep.
- Locate and volunteer at a charity or organization near you.
- Encourage friends and family to get involved with you.

### 5. BE SENSITIVE

- Avoid blaming anyone or assuming someone has the disease because of the way they look or where they or their families come from.
- An infectious disease is not connected to any racial or ethnic group; speak up in kindness when you hear false rumors or negative stereotypes that foster racism and xenophobia.



#### Be Proactive!

- Stay informed with information from credible sources.
- Stay connected with friends, family, and community groups
- Help others in need by volunteering and donating time and resources to trusted organizations
- Keep a positive attitude

#### Resources

San Mateo County Health  
Behavioral Health & Recovery  
Services Access Call Center  
1(800) 686-0101  
1(800) 943-2833 TDD

[smchealth.org](http://smchealth.org)

*Consider seeking professional help if you or a loved one is having difficulty coping.*