

PROTOCOL TO HANDLE PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES DURING NATION WIDE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses belonging to the family of Coronaviridae, which infect both animals and humans. A new coronavirus that previously has not been identified in humans emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019. On 11 March 2020, WHO declared Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic and reiterated the call for countries to take immediate actions and scale up response to treat, detect and reduce transmission to save people's lives. India is at a crucial juncture in its fight against COVID-19. On March 22, 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced nationwide lockdown for 21 days and later on it was extended till 3 May 2020. The government has aggressively stepped up the response measures - find, isolate, test, treat and trace. The Indian government has so far followed a step-by-step model and been on the front foot with early screening at airports from mid-January onwards, initiating travel restrictions and in collaboration with states, applying restrictions on events and on places of social gathering including restaurants, theatres and gyms.

Temperature scans and improving personal and office hygiene are important. Also, we must assist in social and office distancing by practicing work from home, creating adequate space between those employees that are at work for critical activities, and ensuring proper care for our colleagues who may get infected.

Understanding the importance of Lockdown

- Lockdown is meant to prevent the spread of infection from one person to another, to protect ourselves and others.
- This means, not stepping out of the house except for buying necessities, reducing the number of trips outside, and ideally only a single, healthy family member making the trips when absolutely necessary.
- If there is anyone in the house who is very sick and may need to get medical help, you must be aware of the health facility nearest to you.

Handling Social isolation

- Staying at home can be quite nice for some time, but can also be boring and restricting. Here are some ways to keep positive and cheerful.

- Be busy. Have a regular schedule. Students can do their studies via online lectures, reading books, can enroll for online short term courses, webinars. Employees can do work from home online, help in doing some household chores.
- Distract yourself from negative emotions by listening to music, reading, watching an entertaining programme on television. If you had old hobbies like painting, gardening or stitching, go back to them. Rediscover your hobbies.
- Eat well and drink plenty of fluids.
- Be physically active. Do simple indoor exercises that will keep you fit and feeling fit.
- Sharing is caring. Understand if someone around you needs advice, food or other essentials, be willing to share.
- Elderly people may feel confused, lost and need help. Offer them help by getting them what they need, their medicines, daily needs etc.
- If you have children at home, keep them busy by allowing them to help in the household chores, make them feel responsible and acquire new skills.

Focus on facts, reject rumors and theories

- Knowledge is power; the more you know about a certain issue, the less fearful you may feel. Make sure to access and believe only the most reliable sources of information for self-protection.
- Do not follow sensational news or social media posts which may impact your mental state. Do not spread or share any unverified news or information further.
- Do not keep discussing all the time about who got sick and how. Instead learn about who got well and recovered.
- Stick to the known advice- use mask or cloth to cover your mouth or face, maintain hand hygiene and keep a physical distance from others, stay at home most of the time unless it is necessary to go out. If you have to go out, please take precautions, use mask and maintain social distancing. It is being careful about yourself and also about care of others.
- A common cold is not Corona infection. The symptoms of Corona have been well described. Follow etiquette of sneezing, coughing, avoiding spitting in public places etc.
- In most people, the Corona infection causes mild symptoms and the person only needs to follow social distancing till he/she stops being infective, usually 2 weeks.
- Mild infection does not require a person to be admitted in hospital.
- Only people who have breathing difficulties need to be in hospital.
- Most people recover.

Measures to handle fear and anxiety associated with lockdown

- At times of anxiety, practice breathing slowly for a few minutes. Try and distance the thoughts that are making you anxious. Think of something calm and serene, and slow down your mind.
- When feeling angry and irritated, calm your mind, count back from 10 to 1, distracting yourself helps.
- Even when feeling afraid, deal with it by asking yourself: What is under my control?, Am I unnecessarily worrying about the worst thing that can happen?, When I have been stressed in the past, how have I managed?, What are the things I can do to help myself and be positive?
- Feeling lonely or sad is also quite common. Stay connected with others. Communication can help you to connect with family and friends. Call up people whom you have not spoken to and surprise them. Discuss happy events, common interests, exchange cooking tips, share music.
- If any of these emotions persist continuously for several days, despite your trying to get out of it, talk about it with someone. If the feelings worsen, a person may feel helpless, hopeless and feel that life is not worth living.
- If that happens, call our helpline numbers Miss Yogita Ubhe, Clinical Psychologist (8788618940) for students and staff and Dr.Shewtha Shetty, Mentorship Committee Chairman (9423066101).

What is NOT advisable

- Avoid tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Use of tobacco or alcohol or other drugs to cope with emotions or boredom can worsen physical, mental health and reduce immunity. People who already have a substance-use problem may require professional help, especially when they feel low in mood or are stressed.
- Do not shun or judge people with a CoVid infection. While you need to maintain a physical distance and keep yourself safe to prevent such infection, remember they need care and concern. If you know someone who might have the infection, tell them about precautions, and how to get medical assistance, if required.
- If you happen to get infected with Corona, remember most people get better. Do not panic. Practice self-isolation and take medications that are advised.

Emotional issues after recovery

- While it is wonderful to recover from Covid infection, you may actually face stress after you have recovered and wish to get back into the community. You

may have fear about your loved ones falling ill.

- People who do not understand the illness well may actually keep you at a distance, which is also very stressful and isolating.
- You may experience feelings of guilt that you were not able to work or care for others. This may lead to feelings of depression, helplessness or frustration.
- Use the ways mentioned earlier to deal with these feelings. Share your positive story that it is possible to recover from COVID infection.
- Recognize mental health problems in your near and dear ones.
- Just as you can recognize your own mental health problems, be sensitive to such problems in your near and dear ones, which may include:
 - Changes in sleep patterns
 - Difficulty in sleeping and concentrating
 - Worsening of health problems
 - Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs
 - If the problems persist, please contact the helpline numbers or contact your doctor or a mental health professional.

Persons with mental health issues

- Persons who had previous mental illness may face newer challenges during self-isolation or Covid infection.
- They would also have the same fears and stress as others which may worsen their previous mental health condition.
- Social isolation may make them more withdrawn, moody and irritable
- They may not seek or get easy access to medicines and counseling.
- Help and support is vital for persons with mental illness from their families and other care givers.
- Health helplines can provide support, in addition to regular taking of prescribed medication, a regular daily routine, keeping engaged and positive.
- Remember, good mental status in the difficult times may win you the battle more easily

NEED HELP? FOR ANY GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE REGARDING COVID 19, PLEASE CALL HELPLINE NUMBERS (020-27805600).