Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic

An Urgent Issue

Both SARS-CoV-2 and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly affected the mental health of adults and children. In a 2021 study, nearly half of Americans surveyed reported recent symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder, and 10% of respondents felt their mental health needs were not being met. Rates of anxiety, depression, and substance use disorder have increased since the beginning of the pandemic. And people who have mental illnesses or disorders and then get COVID-19 are more likely to die than those who don't have mental illnesses or disorders.

Mental health is a focus of NIH research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers at NIH and supported by NIH are creating and studying tools and strategies to understand, diagnose, and prevent mental illnesses or disorders and improve mental health care for those in need.

How COVID-19 Can Impact Mental Health

If you get COVID-19, you may experience a number of symptoms related to brain and mental health, including:

- Cognitive and attention deficits (brain fog)
- Anxiety and depression
- Psychosis
- Seizures
- Suicidal behavior

Data suggest that people are more likely to develop mental illnesses or disorders in the months following infection, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). People with Long COVID may experience many symptoms related to brain function and mental health.

How the Pandemic Affects Developing Brains

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children is not yet fully understood. NIH-supported research is investigating factors that

may influence the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children during the pandemic, including:

- Changes to routine
- Virtual schooling
- Mask wearing
- Caregiver absence or loss
- Financial instability

Not Everyone Is Affected Equally

While the COVID-19 pandemic can affect the mental health of anyone, some people are more likely to be affected than others. People who are more likely to experience symptoms of mental illnesses or disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- People from racial and ethnic minority groups
- Mothers and pregnant people
- People with financial or housing insecurity
- Children
- People with disabilities
- People with preexisting mental illnesses or substance use problems
- Health care workers

People who belong to more than one of these groups may be at an even greater risk for mental illness.

Frequently Asked Questions

I have a preexisting mental illness. Is COVID-19 more dangerous to me?

COVID-19 can be worse for people with mental illnesses. Data suggest that people who reported symptoms of anxiety or depression had a greater chance of being hospitalized after a COVID-19 diagnosis than people without those symptoms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that having mood disorders and schizophrenia spectrum disorders can increase a

person's chances of having severe COVID-19. People with mental illnesses who belong to minority groups are also more likely to get COVID-19. And people with schizophrenia are significantly more likely to get COVID-19 and more likely to die from it.

Despite these risks, effective treatments are available. If you have a preexisting mental illness and get COVID-19, talk to your health care professional to determine the treatment plan that's appropriate for you.

I'm experiencing symptoms of a mental illness or disorder. What should I do?

If you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, or any other mental illness or disorder, there are ways you can get help. For immediate help:

- Call **911**
- Call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988**
- Call or text the Disaster Distress Helpline, **1-800-985-5990**
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration can help you find mental health or substance use specialists.
- Talk to your health care professional or mental health care professional. Together, you can work on a plan to manage or reduce your symptoms.

What research is NIH doing on the mental health impacts of COVID-19?

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and other NIH Institutes have created research initiatives to address mental health for people in general and for the most vulnerable people specifically. Examples of this research include:

- NIMH launched a five-year research study called RECOUP-NY to promote the mental health of New Yorkers from communities hard-hit by COVID-19. The study will test the use of a new care model called Problem Management Plus (PM+) that can be used by non-specialists.
- A study funded by NIMH is examining the use of mobile apps to address mental health disparities.

- The *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) is funding research to understand the effects of mask usage for children, including any impacts on their emotional and brain development.

- NIMH is funding research on the impacts of the pandemic on underserved and vulnerable populations and on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

- The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) is funding research on how COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 affect the causes and consequences of alcohol misuse.

- A collaborative study supported by NIMH and the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) enrolled more than 3,600 people from all 50 U.S. states to understand the stressors affecting people during the pandemic.

https://covid19.nih.gov/covid-19-topics/mental-health