

# COVID-19: Moving Forward

Questions and answers  
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As COVID-19 evolves and causes changes in our everyday lives, it's important to think about how we can best move forward. Dr. David Berube, Chief Medical Officer for Group Protection, answers some important questions about what both individuals and employers can do to cope and adapt to an ever-changing situation.

**Q. Some parts of the country are beginning to reopen businesses and other places where the public gathers. What are some precautionary actions individuals and businesses can take to protect themselves?**

**A.** Because the main route of virus transmission occurs through the air, being cautious when sharing the same breathing area with others is important:

- Facial coverings such as masks catch the wearer's exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols to prevent them from traveling in the air and being inhaled by others nearby. Masks in this setting are not intended to protect the wearer, and rather are intended to protect exhaled air. This is why the greatest protection occurs when all parties wear a mask to protect each other.

When circumstances improve enough that being in crowded spaces and social gatherings is once again acceptable, one way to reduce exposure in confined spaces such as buildings, homes, and automobiles is to dilute the potential number of viral particles in the air. This can be achieved by increasing the fresh air exchange in the area as well as by filtration. For example, opening the windows of a car or in a room at home will bring in fresh outdoor air and dilute the inside air.

- Frequent hand washing and/or use of sanitizing liquids, not touching one's face, and being careful about touching others, are still important ways to reduce exposure risk. We should consider developing new ways to greet others that do not involve handshaking or hugging, such as the "elbow bump." These simple actions can all help reduce the spread of many types of illnesses, in addition to COVID-19.

**Q. There's so much news out there—and not all of it is accurate. Can you identify and address key misconceptions about COVID-19?**

**A.** One common misconception is that people who feel well and have no signs and symptoms of illness, including no fever, are not infected and cannot spread the virus. The opposite is true. Individuals who are infected with the virus often do not have fever and other signs and symptoms of illness, yet they can be contagious and cause others to become ill. This is one reason why the virus can spread very quickly in a community.

That leads us to the next misconception—some believe the reason to implement physical distancing, stay-at-home orders, and quarantine is to protect oneself. Again, the opposite is true. These actions are mainly to protect others from getting the infection from you if you have it, especially those who are in the highest risk groups. Which is why potentially infected individuals need to be in quarantine, follow social physical distancing rules and wear a facial covering. Even those who feel well could spread the virus and these actions help to reduce that possibility.

**Q. The changes brought about by COVID-19 have caused a lot of mental stress and anxiety. What are a few tips for managing mental health during this pandemic?**

**A.** This is an important question, because with all of the focus on staying physically healthy, sometimes the need to take care of your mental health can get lost. Each person is unique and has different prior and current life situations, so there is no single answer or group of tips that is right for everyone.

All of us come from different backgrounds, have different experiences and resilience levels, and have been impacted differently by this virus. Some may be experiencing financial and job losses or new and/or changed responsibilities; and even worse, some may have experienced the loss of loved ones. No matter what an individual's particular situation is, it's important to:

## Identify and deal with stressors

- Identify the biggest stressors to focus on—which ones are most important and have the most impact?
- Accept some degree of disruption from the stressors that can't be avoided at the present time. It may be possible to partially reduce the impact of some stressors while accepting the temporary or potentially long-term impact of others.
- Take control of things that may have been lost or altered, such as the scheduling and managing the times you sleep and wake, eat, exercise, start and stop working, take breaks, and assist others, etc.

## Focus and build on the positives

- Establish and maintain (virtually when necessary) social and professional relationships with family, friends, co-workers, mental health professionals, and others. This support helps people remember they aren't alone in their situation; people care, understand, and may even be able to help each other identify key stressors and possible solutions.
- Develop a focus on things which bring joy, happiness and hope, such as:
  - Planning for an upcoming birthday or other celebration
  - Setting up a social event with others using technologies such as FaceTime, Zoom, and WebEx
  - Exercising, dancing, watching movies, and doing other things that are enjoyable
- Realize the current pandemic situation will end at some time in the future and will not last forever.
- Identify strengths and strategies that may have helped with past traumatic situations.

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