

COVID-19 and Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic is taking a large toll on people's mental health in the United States. Societal responses to the pandemic in the U.S., such as stay-at-home orders, have led to social isolation and loneliness and to nationwide job loss and financial distress for tens of millions.¹ Often during pandemics, more people experience negative mental health effects than those who contract the infection – and the mental health impacts can last longer.² Recommendations from experts on how to address and mitigate pandemic-related mental health impacts are not new. Experts recommend:

- Expanding access to mental health services;
- Working to end stigmas associated with mental health issues;
- Practicing self-care such as following health daily routines and exercising; and
- Seeking out mental health services if needed.

This report:

- Describes how the pandemic is impacting mental health in the United States;
- Identifies the most common signs of mental health distress;
- Outlines different types of self-care and options to help improve mental health;
- Highlights disproportionate mental health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Provides information on mental health resources.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC

In April 2020, 45% of adults reported negative mental health impacts from worry and stress related to the pandemic.³ Although the percentage dropped to 39% of adults in May, mental health professionals are fearful that people will feel negative mental health impacts from the pandemic for years to come.⁴ Mental health stressors include grief due to deaths from COVID-19; stress from worry about exposure to the virus; stress from losing a job or income; and social isolation, among others.

Front-line health care workers have been under substantial chronic stress from treating patients, the magnitude of the epidemic, and from a lack of necessary personal protective equipment. The Black community in the United States has faced significantly higher rates of illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19; in addition, the Black community and other non-White racial and ethnic groups are also bearing the largest share of financial distress caused by the pandemic.⁵

The Kaiser Family Foundation found that negative health impacts were highest in households with job or income loss and in households with healthcare workers.⁶ Job loss and economic disruption are both associated with increased depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide.⁷ Worry and stress due to social isolation and fear of getting sick can lead to or increase anxiety and depression.⁸

During this pandemic, almost one in three adults reports falling behind on paying bills or expenses like food and health insurance. One in four adults reports that someone in their household had skipped a meal or had to rely on a government or charity food program. The impacts from the pandemic, of course, are not limited to adults. Nearly every state in the country closed schools in March 2020 for the remainder of the school year, impacting students' education but also impacting access to food programs; physical, social, and mental health services; and opportunities for social engagement.¹⁰

SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS ^{11, 12}

Stress

- Grinding teeth, clenched jaw
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Muscle tension in neck, face, shoulders
- Problems sleeping
- Tiredness, exhaustion
- Weight loss or gain

Anxiety

- Difficulty concentrating
- Excessive worry about concerns such as finances
- General sense something bad is going to happen
- Persistent worry, overwhelmed by emotions
- Problems sleeping
- Restlessness and irritability

Panic Attacks

- Feelings of dread
- Often sudden onset
- Pounding heart or rapid heart rate
- Restriction of activity for fear of additional panic attacks
- Sweating, trembling, shortness of breath

Depression

- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Lack of interest and pleasure in daily activities
- Lack of energy, inability to concentrate
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide
- Significant weight loss or gain

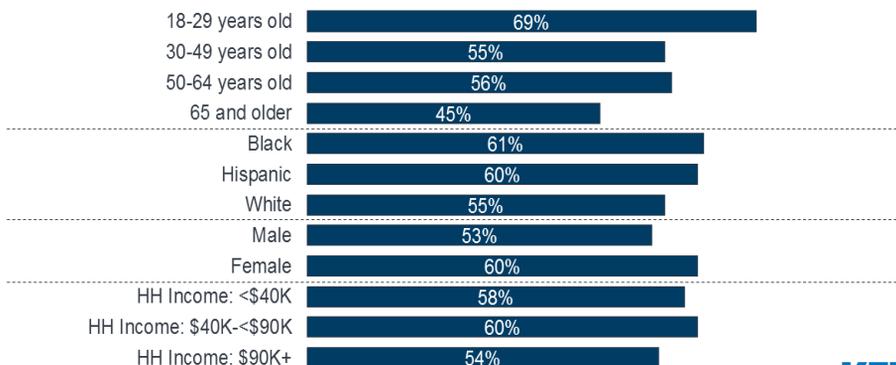
Risk of Suicide

- Changes in behavior, sleep patterns, eating habits
- Erratic behavior, harming self or others
- Loss of interest in friends, hobbies, activities
- Low self-esteem, feeling worthless, guilt, self-hatred
- No hope for the future
- Personality changes: withdrawal, irritability, anxiety
- Recent loss through death, divorce, separation
- Sadness
- Talking about dying or self-harm

Figure 12

Majorities Across Most Groups Report Worry Or Stress Related To Coronavirus Outbreak Has Impacted Mental Health

Percent of each of the following groups who say that worry or stress related to the coronavirus outbreak has caused them to experience adverse effects on their mental health or wellbeing in the past two months:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted April 15-20, 2020). See topline for full question wording.



Source: <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-late-april-2020-economic-and-mental-health-impacts-of-coronavirus/>

MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS¹³

Public and mental health experts point to numerous ways that can help individuals manage their mental health during the pandemic, many of which focus on managing stress and anxiety. The resource section following at the end of this report includes links to resources (many COVID-specific) for addressing mental health issues, including ones specific to the Black community, healthcare workers, and children.

- Cardiovascular exercise
- Dance
- Yoga
- Free exercise videos on the web
- Stretch
- Walk

- Tasks around the house (craft, garden, organize)
- Hobbies
- Journaling or writing
- Listen to music
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Puzzles and games
- Read a book/listen to an audiobook

Manage How You Get Information

- Limit how often and how long you view news sources
- Read news, rather than watch or listen to it
- View only trusted sources

Follow Health Daily Routines

- Connect with loved ones
- Eat nutritious foods as much as possible
- Get dressed
- Move your body
- Prioritize sleep

Stay Connected While Physically Distancing

- Ask for help when you need it
- Do virtual activities with others
- Have contact information for close family and friends
- Offer help to neighbors/community members in need

Use Mental Health Resources If Needed

- Contact a local mental health agency or organization
- Find online support groups



NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE

English 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Spanish 1-888-628-9454

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and Latinx communities in the United States. In ordinary times, Black individuals are 20% more likely than the general population to experience mental health disorders and less likely to seek professional treatment for these disorders.¹⁴ Public health experts see the pandemic magnifying these existing inequities in American society.¹⁵

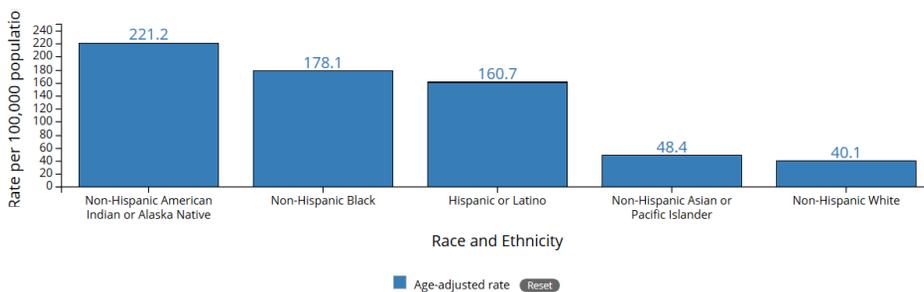
State and local health department data show that Black and Latinx communities have a disproportionate number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. Public health experts point to causes that include disparities in health from longstanding racism and socioeconomic factors and having less access to regular health care.¹⁶

BIPOC and Latinx workers are more likely to have lost their jobs due to the pandemic and are more likely to be classified as essential workers – requiring them to work and increasing the risk of contracting the virus. These impacts are compounded by significant pre-pandemic gaps in wages and employment opportunities for White households compared to non-White households.¹⁷

At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 data on deaths have significant gaps in racial and ethnic information and data on testing from the federal Department of Health and Human Services has similar gaps. The HHS Assistant Secretary and coronavirus testing czar called this a “flaw in the system.”¹⁸

Many organizations have created or written about COVID-related mental health resources for BIPOC and Latinx communities.¹⁹ Several resources are listed in the Resources section of this report.

Age-adjusted COVID-19-associated hospitalization rates by race and ethnicity, COVID-NET, March – June 13, 2020



Source:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

MOVING FORWARD

Experts’ recommendations to help bolster individuals’ mental health during the pandemic focus on providing and expanding access to mental health resources.

- **Expand access to online mental health treatment services**²⁰
 - Research shows benefits of care via videoconferencing for anxiety and mood disorders
 - Response to the pandemic has hastened the adoption of telemedicine technology worldwide
- **Facilitate efforts to build population-wide psychological wellness and resilience**²¹
 - Involve mental health professionals in front line emergency planning and management teams
 - Provide clear, regular, accurate communications about the COVID-19 outbreak²²
- **Foster research to understand the psychological, social, and neuroscientific effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – to apply the learnings to future pandemics and lockdowns**²³

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Crisis and Mental Health Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-TALK (8255) (English); 1-888-628-9454 (Spanish) https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/
Maryland Crisis Line	1-800-422-0009
NAMI Crisis Text Line	Text "NAMI" to 741741 to chat with a trained crisis counselor. English only.
Montgomery County Crisis Center	240-777-4000 https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Program.aspx?id=BHCS/BHCS24hrcrisiscenter-p204.html
EveryMind Montgomery County Text Line	Text 301-738-2255 (Sunday-Thursday, 12pm-9pm)
National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522 https://www.thehotline.org/
National Child Abuse Hotline	1-800-4-A-Child or 1-800-422-4453 or text 1-800-422-4453 https://www.childhelp.org/hotline/
Veteran's Crisis Line	1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 or text 838255 https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/

Online Resources

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI)	COVID-19 Resources and Information Guide https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-and-Mental-Illness-NAMI-Releases-Importan/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US
American Psychological Association	APA COVID-19 Information and Resources https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/
US Department of Health and Human Services	Topic Collection: COVID-19 Behavioral Health Resources https://asprtracie.hhs.gov/technical-resources/115/covid-19-behavioral-health-resources/99
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services	COVID-19 Mental Health Resources https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/RightNav/Coronavirus-mentalhealth.html
Montgomery County Public Schools	COVID-19 School System and Community Resources https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/Coronavirus/COVID-19_School_System_and_Community_Resources%20(002).pdf
EveryMind	https://www.every-mind.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EveryMind_Resource-Sheet_01282019.pdf
Montgomery County African American Health Program	http://aahpmontgomerycounty.org/
Black Mental Wellness	https://www.blackmentalwellness.com/
Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective	https://www.beam.community/
The African American Policy Forum	Covid Care Kit: Resources for Mental Wellness https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HYChUvqT9Gp19KMvJAyxN6I80s1B-45khwa82RIXnkE/edit

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES (cont.)

Online Resources (cont.)

The Mental Health Coalition	Black Mental Health Resources https://thementalhealthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Black-Mental-Health-Resources-MHC.pdf
Montgomery County Medical Society	Physician Mental & Physical Wellbeing Strategies During Crisis https://www.montgomerymedicine.org/physician-mental-physical-well-being-strategies-during-crisis/
American Medical Association	Health Care: Managing Mental Health During COVID-19 https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/managing-mental-health-during-covid-19
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology	Coronavirus/COVID-19 Resource Library https://www.aacap.org/coronavirus
On Our Sleeves: The Movement to Transform Children's Mental Health	Behavioral Health Resources for Coronavirus https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/giving/on-our-sleeves/find-help/tools-for-you/coronavirus
Child Mind Institute	Supporting Families During COVID-19 https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/
Our Mental Health Minute	https://www.ourmhm.com/

Mental Health Screening Tools

Mental Health America (MHA)	https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools
Montgomery County African American Health Program	https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/aahpmontgomery

Sources for Mental Health Referrals

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)	Confidential, free, 24/7 information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information. https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/ 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
American Psychological Association	Find local mental health resources during the COVID-19 crisis https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/local-mental-health
The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation: To eradicate the stigma around mental health issues in the African-American community	COVID-19 Free Virtual Therapy Support https://borislhensonfoundation.org/covid-19-free-virtual-therapy-support-campaign/
Black Mental Health Alliance	https://blackmentalhealth.com/connect-with-a-therapist/

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
 - ² <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbp/v42n3/1516-4446-rbp-1516444620200008.pdf>
 - ³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>;
<https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-may-2020-health-and-economic-impacts/>
 - ⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>;
<https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbp/v42n3/1516-4446-rbp-1516444620200008.pdf>
 - ⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>
 - ⁶ <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-late-april-2020-economic-and-mental-health-impacts-of-coronavirus/>; <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbp/v42n3/1516-4446-rbp-1516444620200008.pdf>
 - ⁷ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>;
<https://www.texasstateofmind.org/uploads/whitepapers/COVID-MHSUDImpacts.pdf>
 - ⁸ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/mental-health-covid-19/art-20482731>
 - ⁹ <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-may-2020-health-and-economic-impacts/>
 - ¹⁰ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
 - ¹¹ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/risks.htm>
 - ¹² <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/psychological-impact>; <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11874-stress>;
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/onemind/2020/03/17/when-home-becomes-the-workplace-mental-health-and-remote-work/#2f6499131760>; <https://mhanational.org/living-mental-illness-during-covid-19-outbreak-preparing-your-wellness>
 - ¹³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059542>, <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-and-Mental-Illness-NAMI-Releases-Importan/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US>;
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>
 - ¹⁴ <http://aahpmtgomerycounty.org/mentalhealth/>
 - ¹⁵ Pappas, Stephanie, "Fighting inequity in the face of COVID-19," American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) (June 1, 2020); <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/covid19-behavioral-health-disparities-black-latino-communities.pdf>;
<https://sph.umich.edu/news/2020posts/pandemics-toll-on-african-american-mental-health.html>; <https://salud-america.org/mental-health-covid-19-and-their-impacts-on-latinos/>; <https://salud-america.org/coronavirus-job-loss-stress-latinos/>
 - ¹⁶ <https://naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-Equity-Considerations.pdf>;
<https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>; Pappas, Stephanie, "Fighting inequity in the face of COVID-19," American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) (June 1, 2020).
 - ¹⁷ <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>
 - ¹⁸ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/14/missing-data-veils-coronavirus-damage-to-minority-communities-316198>;
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>
 - ¹⁹ <https://www.rwif.org/en/blog/2020/05/caring-for-mental-health-in-communities-of-color-during-covid-19.html>;
<https://adaa.org/african-americans>; <https://www.self.com/story/bipoc-mental-health-coronavirus>
 - ²⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7104190/pdf/main.pdf>
 - ²¹ https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/topics/covid/pandemic_mental_health.ashx?la=en&hash=08B24DF10F9CBDDF46CFD770AC7AE4C810BBE706
 - ²² <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbp/v42n3/1516-4446-rbp-1516444620200008.pdf>
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- <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2215036620301681?token=38D049163B62C39B0D924830A02BE77B61D44DDD580E0F1733EA5D0DFBAA7EB16971CAF01843B3D1DE331F2B834E3E36>

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

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