



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
SPRINGFIELD 62702

COVID-19 RESPONSE

JB PRITZKER
Governor

ROB JEFFREYS
Director

Memorandum

To: Men and Women in Custody

From: Dr. Melvin Hinton, Chief of Mental Health Services

Date: March 26, 2020

Subject: Coping with the Stress of COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) spread, I want to let you know that we as a Department take very seriously our responsibility to maintain the health and safety of the people in our custody. With that in mind, please know that we will be doing everything we can to monitor your well-being and to provide needed medical or mental health assistance as the situation warrants. The measures we have enacted to limit movement will help provide the type of “social distancing” recommended and required to slow the transmission of COVID-19. These changes will certainly create anxiety and disruptions in how we normally operate and may cause all of us to feel greater stress in the days ahead. Please refer to the below suggestions for what you can do to cope with that stress. I cannot say how long these changes will last but know that we will be working closely with Federal and State health officials to manage the situation and will return to normal operations just as soon as they give us the green light to do so. We appreciate your cooperation and patience. Please let staff know of any changes to your medical or mental health that require our assistance.

Coping with the Stress of COVID-19

This outbreak of COVID-19 (coronavirus) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in anyone. Coping successfully with stress will make you and the people who care about you stronger. We will eventually get through this period and it will be important to weather through this time as best as possible.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background and the things that make you different from other people. There is no “normal” way to react. How you react is likely normal for you.



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Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.

Things you can do to support yourself:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news reports about the illness. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activity you enjoy.
- Connect with others as often as you can. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Ways to reduce stress in yourself and others:

- Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make the situation less stressful. When you share accurate information about COVID-19 you can help make people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them.
- People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their current treatments and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.

If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others:

- If it is not emergency, fill out and send a request form to speak with someone from the Mental Health Department.
- If it is an emergency, notify any staff person that you need to speak with a member of the Crisis Intervention Team.