

Some stress relieving activities

Based on studies of health care providers the following are simple, but helpful strategies when coping with communicable disease outbreaks:

- Find out as much as possible about the disease, from a reliable source,
- Take regular breaks, go for a 15 minute walk, when you can bring a friend
- Eat sensibly, drink lots of water
- Invite other health care providers to share meals or quiet time with you
- Share concerns and issues with reliable and trustworthy co-workers
- Stay connected with family and friends, even if only by phone, email or social media
- Get some rest, try to limit the number of long shifts
- Include yourself on the list of people you are taking care of
- Remember to laugh!



Delayed Stress Reactions

Past experiences have shown that after tragic or extreme events, it may take weeks to adjust to 'regular' routines. **This is normal.** Following these tips on self-care could help you cope with delayed reactions.

Family Needs

One of the most difficult challenges for health care providers is to maintain some kind of balance between the demands of the emergency and the needs of our own families. Keep lines of communication open.

When to Seek Help

The information offered in this brochure is a reference point to help you understand some of the stress reactions you or other family members, friends and colleagues may experience. If, at any time, you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope it is important to seek out additional assistance.

If you are experiencing some of the following concerns, it may be time to seek help from a health professional such as a psychologist, social worker, counselor, spiritual care advisor.

- "I can't return to a normal routine"
- "I feel helpless/hopeless"
- "I have thoughts of hurting myself or others"
- "I am drinking too much or excessively using other drugs"

Resources in your community which may be available

- Crisis centres, employee assistance programs
- Family services or social support agencies
- Someone you trust
- Faith based or community groups

Communicable Diseases

Psychosocial Considerations for Responding Health Care Providers



"I was not prepared for what I saw...or did"

What is Communicable Disease?

Communicable diseases spread from one person to another or from an animal to a person. The spread often happens via airborne viruses or bacteria, but also through blood or other bodily fluid. The terms infectious and contagious are also used to describe communicable disease. Recent concerns for our health has been HIV, pandemic influenza, ebola and many others.

Who is affected? Everyone can be affected, patients, their families and friends, public, worried well, first responders, and health care providers. **Health Care Provider** include lab staff, scientists, nurses, doctors, public health, support staff, cleaning staff, volunteers.

I'm scared? The most frequent concern voiced by health care providers is usually fear of infection of your family and friends and the consequences of the disease on their health, and naturally on your own health!

Stressors for health care providers and scientists during a communicable disease outbreak may include:

- increased risk of infection
- exposure to high number of distressed clients
- an increased workload(1)

In addition, working with strict bio-security measures; high mortality rates, exposure to late stage symptoms and stigmatization, can be frightening. When such stressors continue over a period of time, it can reduce your ability to perform assigned duties and can have long term effects on your mental health, physical wellbeing, and quality of life.

Possible Reactions you might expect

Fortunately most reactions will be relatively short term and will dissipate with time, some could be longer term and you may want to seek assistance.

Physical Reactions:

- higher blood pressure, pulse
- trouble breathing
- fatigue
- nausea, upset stomach or diarrhea
- tension in shoulders, neck or back
- sweating or chills
- restlessness

Emotional Reactions

- strong identification with victims
- anger or blaming
- sadness, grief, depression or moodiness
- apathy or feelings of inadequacy
- a sense of vulnerability
- suicidal thoughts or feeling lonely

Cognitive Reactions:

- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty making decisions
- confusion or disorientation
- excessive rumination

Behavioural Reactions:

- withdrawal from family or friends
- increased alcohol or drug use
- hyperactivity, constant talking, periods of crying
- sleep pattern changes

Spiritual Reactions

- “why did this happen to me?”
- hopelessness
- loss of faith
- disconnection from community or place of worship

What is Helpful?

Communication is key. It can make an important difference in how you cope. Some other key principles:

- **A sense of Safety:** Find ways to protect yourself and others and explore how to get updated and clear information. When possible attend information meetings or regular briefings
- If you don't already have a **'buddy'** find someone so you can both watch out for each other.
- **Calming strategies** for yourself and others will help in a chaotic environment. Think about what usually works for you. (E.g. a calm voice, taking slow deep breaths, going for a walk).
- **Stay Connected** It's important to stay connected to others, your friends, family and colleagues. Request access to communication tools so you can be in touch with family and friends, crisis lines specific to health care providers
- **Maintain Hope:** Pandemics and disease outbreaks do eventually end. Most people survive. People are working on solutions.

