Stay Connected

The fear associated with a public health emergency can push people apart. People who are normally close to family and friends may avoid contact because they are afraid they might get sick or get someone else sick.

It is important to stay connected with others. Use the phone, e-mail, or other electronic means of communication. If you are anxious about a health risk, talk to someone who can help. This may be your doctor, a family member, friend, member of the clergy, teacher or mental health professional.

If you notice a big change in a loved one, friend or co-worker, reach out to them. Make some time to talk. Watching out for others shows you care. It can be comforting to both of you.

If you or someone you know is having a hard time managing their emotions, seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

If you notice that a loved one, friend or co-worker's behavior has substantially changed, reach out and ask them how they are doing. Make some time to talk, when it is convenient for both of you, and follow up later on to see how they are doing. Watching out for each other demonstrates that you care and it can be comforting to both of you.

Get Reliable Information

When we face uncertainty about health risks, it is important to keep things in perspective. Get information during public health emergencies from:

- Your doctor or healthcare Provider
- Your local health department
- The New Jersey Department of Health website at: http://nj.gov/health/ (800) 367-6543

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

1-800-CDC-INFO (4636)
for assistance in English and Spanish

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

This publication available on-line at www.disastermentalhealthnj.com.

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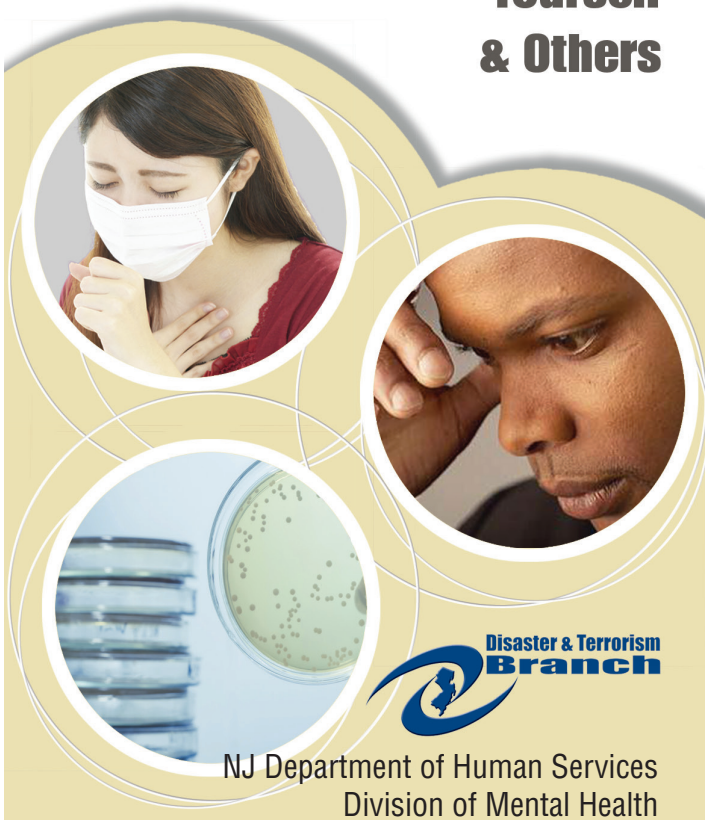
Coping with the Emotional Impact of Public Health Emergencies

Helping Yourself & Others



Disaster & Terrorism Branch

NJ Department of Human Services
Division of Mental Health
& Addiction Services
Disaster & Terrorism Branch

www.disastermentalhealthnj.com

Toll Free Helpline
877-294-HELP (4357)
TTY: 877-294-4356

Coping with Public Health Emergencies

The information in this brochure can help you cope with fears and anxiety related to public health emergencies. Such emergencies may include outbreaks of contagious disease, air or water contamination, or the effects of a natural disaster on individuals, families and communities.

It is natural to be upset when you think your health – or the health of your loved ones - is threatened. Pay attention to your own feelings and take care of your own emotional needs. By doing so, you can better help friends and family members handle their concerns.

Uncertainty

Anxiety can be related to fear of the unknown. It is normal to feel anxious and worried about a spreading disease, especially if there is no known cause or cure, or if the disease manifests as a frightening illness or includes injuries.

Everyone reacts differently to a public health risk.

These are normal reactions:

Physical

- headaches
- tiredness
- increased pulse
- high blood pressure
- changes in appetite
- unexplained aches or pains
- trouble sleeping
- stomach aches

Emotional

- panic
- anxiety
- distrust
- fear
- anger
- irritability
- sadness
- blame
- feeling overwhelmed
- increased stress

Mental

- troubling concentrating
- problems at work or school
- memory problems
- troubling thoughts
- concern about health issues

Behavioral

- avoiding others
- substance abuse
- excessive cleaning or washing
- being overly cautious

Here are some ways you can cope with stress and anxiety:

- Limit your exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from reliable sources
- Educate yourself about the specific health hazard
- Maintain your normal daily routine, if possible
- Exercise, eat well and rest
- Stay active – physically and mentally
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Find comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Share your concerns with others