

	<h1>Guideline Document</h1>				
Ref: GD:	Guidance for Health Care Worker Mental Health During COVID-19 Outbreak				
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Responsibility for Implementation:					

1. Purpose & Scope

The Health Service Executive are taking action to contain COVID-19, however the outbreak has the potential to generate stress in healthcare workers. This guidance was developed because this is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many healthcare workers and their needs are different to those of the general population. It is adapted from mental health considerations developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO)¹, as support for staff mental and psychological well-being during COVID-19 outbreak.

2. Guidance for healthcare workers;

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself. Seek information updates once or twice at specific times during the day. Get the facts. Gather information from the following web sources in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours: [hpsc.ie](https://www.hpsc.ie) or HSE [coronavirus page](#).
- For healthcare workers, feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your colleagues are likely to experience; in fact, it is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. [Managing your stress](#) and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
- Take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies- ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing. Using the strategies that you have used in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. The strategies to alleviate feelings of stress are the same, even if the scenario is different.
- Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods is one way

to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for additional social support- your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.

- Use understandable ways to share messages with people with additional communication needs. Forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information should be utilized if you are a team leader or manager in a healthcare service.

3. Guidance for team leaders or managers in healthcare services;

- Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they will have a better capacity to fulfill their roles.
- Ensure good quality team communication and information updates from the quoted web sources are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from high-stress to lower-stress functions, where possible. Partner inexperienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Initiate, encourage and monitor work breaks. Where possible, implement flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted or have a family member impacted by a stressful event.
- If you are a team leader or manager in a healthcare service, facilitate access to, and ensure staff are aware of where they can access Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme, and Health & Safety advice and information. For HSE staff these services are accessed through the [Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit](#). Managers and team leads are also facing similar stressors as their staff, and potentially additional pressure in the level of responsibility of their role. It is important that the above provisions and strategies are in place for both workers and managers, and that managers are able to role-model self-care strategies that mitigate stress.

4. Guidance for healthcare workers in isolation;

- Stay connected and maintain your social networks/ connections. Even in situations of isolation, try as much as possible to keep your personal daily routines. If health authorities have recommended limiting your physical social contact to contain the outbreak, you can stay connected via e-mail, social media, video conference and telephone.
- During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Contact Details

- Internal regional EAP contact information is available on: <http://workwell.ie/contact-list/contact-your-local-employee-assistance-programme/> and <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplacehthwellbng/stfsuprts/eacounsel/eacs-providers-0217.pdf>
- Staffcare's 24/7 staff counselling careline Tel: 1800 409388

Adapted from: *Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak*
06 March 2020. World Health Organisation
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2