



COVID-19: Managing stress for staff in essential industries

For leaders

COVID-19 has seen rapid changes to our way of life (e.g. study, work, social gatherings), and disrupted plans due to travel restrictions and **physical distancing** measures as part of our effort to slow the spread of transmission.

Looking after our wellbeing, and supporting our teams to do the same, can help to reduce stress. It's also crucial in enabling us to still take calm and effective action in the midst of this global health event.

People are naturally concerned for their own and their loved ones' health and safety

Understanding job stressors

A main source of stress for essential service staff is day-to-day job stress, particularly during a crisis.

- Long working hours
- Overwhelming responsibilities
- Lack of clear instructions
- Poor communication or management
- Working in dangerous or high-pressure situations
- Feeling inadequate or frustrated when they cannot help people with all of their problems
- Avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear.

What can you, as a leader, do to support your team?

Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during COVID-19 means that they will have a better capacity to fulfil their roles and maintain their health and wellbeing. You can where possible:

- Encourage and monitor work breaks to prevent burnout.
- Rotate staff from high-stress to lower-stress functions.
- Partner inexperienced staff with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Ensure that outreach personnel, where possible, enter the community in pairs.
- Implement flexible schedules for staff who are directly impacted or have a family member impacted by a stressful event.

If you feel you or your team need more support, please speak to a healthcare professional or someone you trust.

- Ensure good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Reducing uncertainty during this time can alleviate stress and give staff a better sense of control of the situation.
- Facilitate access to, and ensure staff are aware of, where they can access mental health and psychosocial support services. Knowing that there is support can minimise secondary traumatic stress.
- Showing empathy and compassion can also reduce the effect of burnout and secondary traumatic stress among social and health staff. It's important to acknowledge your staff's stress and remind them that:
 - stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that they are not doing their best to help people where they can
 - they are not responsible for solving all of everyone's problems.

Helpful resources and support

Beyond Blue - Phone: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Beyond Blue online chat.

eheadspace - confidential mental health and wellbeing support for young people (12 - 25 years) and their families, including information, support, and health services. Phone: 1800 650 890 (9am - 1am, 7 days a week). eheadspace online chat.

MensLine - professional telephone and online support and information service for Australian men. Phone 1300 78 99 78 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). MensLine online counselling.

Mindspot - free telephone and online service for people with stress, worry, anxiety, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression and can help you find local services. Call 1800 61 44 34 (8am - 8pm, Monday - Friday; 8am-6pm, Saturday).



If you have any questions about this topic or other health and safety matters, please contact the Injury Prevention team at prevent@icare.nsw.gov.au