

March 3, 2020

Sent on behalf of Distress Crisis Ontario

Dear Members and Partners:

Our earned reputations as trustworthy sources of information and support, Distress and Crisis lines are often relied upon to engage with their communities and provide reassurance, emotional support, reliable information, and referrals to resources.

*We are aware that there are many sources of information circulating regarding (Novel) COVID-19, Corona Virus. Given that the sources are plentiful and the depth and accuracy of information varies we are hoping to provide you with some guidelines and resources to support your work. Please note **the evolving nature of this situation and follow the reliable websites** of Public Health and Health Canada for updated and accurate information. Those websites URL are added in the resource section of this bulletin. Canada's Chief Medical Officer, Theresa Tam, admitted that the global spread of the virus, officially named COVID-19, is concerning and conceded that "the window of opportunity for containment ... is closing."*

Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease physician at UHN's Toronto General Hospital said if there's a silver lining to the situation, it's that a coronavirus outbreak locally wouldn't clash with the flu season, which is winding down.

"This coronavirus ... is not going to overlap with our influenza season so our capacity has improved to hopefully accommodate a greater number of patients who might require hospital needs and intensive care level needs," he said. "In the same breath we have to think beyond the hospital too. We know that many people infected with this virus have mild symptoms or symptoms that might not require hospitalization."

Distress Crisis Ontario (DCO) is closely monitoring the state of the COVID 19, which was first detected in Wuhan, China.

[Public Health Ontario](#) advises that the risk to Ontarians is still considered low. At this time, staff/clients with flu-like symptoms are encouraged to stay home.

DCO is taking guidance from public health agencies at the local, provincial and federal level. These agencies are closely monitoring the status, conducting surveillance and appropriate laboratory testing, and providing public health and infection-control guidance.

For your health and safety, we urge you to adhere to the basic disease-control prevention and control strategies outlined below.

- Keep relevant, accurate information readily available to give out to your staff/clients as needed. The best sources of information are in the referral section below.
- Review your own internal disaster/emergency incident policies and procedures to maintain continuity of operations.
- Familiarize yourself with your local and provincial agencies that may provide direct services and assistance, such as local Public Health, and ensure that referral database information is up-to-date for these agencies.
- Network with your contacts at the aforementioned agencies to remind them of the services you provide and request that your organization be kept abreast of any developments or actions they plan to take, so you can assist in their efforts to inform the public.
- Consider what data collection elements should be added to your Contact Form so that any contacts about COVID 19 can be tracked and documented in case you are asked to report on this information.
- Enable client self-service by including information about your agency's role, as well as links to official sources of information, on your organization's website and social media presence.
- Direct callers to the right extension or audio message containing COVID 19 information by setting up an option in your Phone tree within your phone system.

PROTECT YOURSELF AND PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze by using a tissue or cough into “the crook of your elbow” if you don't have a tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze and before eating. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- If you get sick with cough, fever or difficulty breathing, stay home and call for medical help (your doctor or [Telehealth](tel:1-866-797-0000): 1-866-797-0000 or, if it's an emergency, call 911). Advise your health-care provider about your symptoms before you go to see them so that they can properly manage your visit.

BASIC FIRST AID ITEMS YOU SHOULD HAVE

- Having a thermometer is a good idea to monitor your health. Also keep at home hand sanitizer, decongestant, fever reducers (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen), disinfectant household wipes and your provincial health card.

As of March 2nd the Canadian government has issued [a Level 3 advisory](#) to avoid **all non-essential** travel to China and some other countries on the list provided (this list is being updated ongoing) and to avoid **all** travel to China's Hubei province due to the current status of COVID19.

For those who have travelled or choose to travel to China and some other listed countries, it is **critical note** that the Canadian government is urging [anyone who travels these identified areas to self-isolate](#)

[themselves for 14 days](#) upon their return to Canada. This means staying at home and limiting your contact with other people for the 14-day period. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that people returning from the identified areas to contact their local Public Health Authority within 24 hours of arriving in Canada. This will [reduce your risk of spreading infection to others](#). In Kitchener-Waterloo, please contact the [Region of Waterloo Public Health unit](#); in Brantford, the [Brant County Health unit](#); in Toronto, the [Toronto Public Health](#) unit, or a Public Health near you.

Public Health authorities are also advising travelers returning from the identified areas to **self-monitor for signs and symptoms** for 14 days after leaving the area. If you experience symptoms within 14 days, avoid contact with others (e.g., stay home from school, work or child care; avoid group activities, public places or taking public transit; and refrain from having visitors). Also, follow-up with a health care provider and your local Public Health unit.

Resources

www.canada.ca › diseases › 2019-novel-coronavirus-infection

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>

www.ontario.ca

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2020/02/26/is-ontario-ready-for-a-coronavirus-pandemic>

<https://www.blg.com/en/Home/insights/2020/03/Employer-strategies-for-managing-novel-coronavirus-risks-in-the-workplace>