

## **Public Mental Health and Wellbeing and Covid-19**

### **Introduction**

The LGA and the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) have jointly produced this briefing for Directors of Public Health about the public mental health and wellbeing issues arising from the Covid-19 outbreak.

Effective responses to the public mental health and wellbeing impact of Covid-19 will be essential to sustain the measures necessary to contain the virus and aid recovery.

Directors of Public Health are leading the local public mental health and wellbeing response. The role of the Director of Public Health in response to a major incident is identified in the Government's Guidance on the Director of Public Health (2020 revised), Health Protection in Local Government (2013), and summarised in an Association of Directors of Public Health [major incidents checklist](#) published in 2018.

### **Public Mental Health and Wellbeing Impacts**

While many people have acted in solidarity in response to COVID-19, and there will be some positive benefits from this community spirit and response, the epidemic will likely have many psychological impacts on the population which may have a detrimental effect on the short, medium and long-term mental health of some residents. In turn, this may reduce people's resilience and their ability to cope. Longer term impacts in terms of trauma, grief and distress may exacerbate the burden of mental ill-health in the community long after recovery.

The behaviours and environments needed to curtail the spread of COVID-19 are known risk factors for mental health difficulties. The diagram below shows potential mental health impacts of COVID-19 across the life course. There will be additional impacts for people with a learning disability and/or autism which will need careful consideration. Students and frontline staff are likely to have additional impacts too.

# Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 Across Life Course



	Pre-Term	0-5 Years	School Years	Working Age Adults	Old Age
Key issues to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxiety about impact of COVID on baby</li> <li>Financial worries</li> <li>Anxiety about delivery and access to care</li> <li>Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coping with significant changes to routine</li> <li>Isolation from friends</li> <li>Impact of parental stress and coping on child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School progress and exams</li> <li>Boredom</li> <li>Anxiety or depression or other MH problems</li> <li>Isolation from friends</li> <li>Impact of parental stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balancing work and home</li> <li>Being out of work</li> <li>Carer Stress</li> <li>Anxiety about measures and family or dependents or children</li> <li>Financial Worry</li> <li>Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Isolation and disruption of routine</li> <li>Anxiety from dependent on services</li> <li>Financial worry</li> <li>Fear about impact of COVID if infected</li> </ul>
Staff/Vols	Cumulative load of stress from significant changes. Traumatic incidents. Isolation from work colleagues. Having to manage working from home. Potential bullying from or to others as part of not coping				
Loss	Loss of loved ones dying may be particularly severe and grieving disrupted because of inability to do normal grieving rites eg as be physically close to dying person, have usual funeral rites, attend funeral etc				
Specific Issues	Impact of delayed diagnoses and treatment (eg chronic conditions, surgery, people living in pain). Suicide and self harm risk for most at risk populations. Members of faith communities may feel disconnected during closure of premises. Domestic abuse may be issues across lifecourse. Drug and Alcohol issues .People reliant on foodbanks or on low incomes or self employed may have additional stress.				

Some people will experience trauma – that is harmful experiences or life-threatening events that can have lasting impacts on mental, physical, emotional and/ or social well-being. It is a normal part of a human response to major emergencies and may not require specific medical support unless Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is diagnosed. But there are a range of harmful impacts which may result, including anxiety, depression, inability to cope, grief and loss from bereavement, domestic abuse and crowd behaviour which creates social norms which reinforce harmful behaviours (for example, panic buying making those vulnerable less able to cope).

There may be additional stress for people who have to make major lifestyle changes, such as fit and active over 70 year olds who are self isolating or people who have had procedures or medical treatment postponed. This could include children or young people waiting for CAMHs assessments.

These impacts could be **short term** (for the duration of the epidemic), **medium term** (2 year) or **long term**. They can be experienced by all sections and all ages of society. Consequences could include increased demand on the NHS and local government, increased suicide, suicide attempts and self harm, increased cost to public services and increased workplace sickness absence due to stress.

<b>Short term impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxiety caused by concerns about outbreak and possible illness.</li> <li>Loneliness caused by self isolation and social distancing.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress caused by adjusting to new routines, financial and employment insecurity.</li> <li>• Depression caused by lack of activity or exercise, loss of normal routine, increased caring role.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium term impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post traumatic stress caused by impact of outbreak.</li> <li>• Depression caused by loneliness and isolation.</li> <li>• Increased risk of suicide and self harm.</li> <li>• Relationship breakdown.</li> </ul>
<b>Long term impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief caused by bereavement.</li> <li>• Reoccurrence of previous mental health problems.</li> <li>• Support people to return to normality and/or prepare for a second wave of infections.</li> </ul> <p>For children and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental and behavioural issues arising due to isolation or social distancing at key developmental milestones.</li> <li>• Development of mental health disorders as a result of the stress.</li> </ul>

### **Key principles of local responses**

Directors of Public Health will as part of responding to COVID19 prioritise locally the work they are undertaking. Public Mental Health in all aspects, including but not limited to suicide risk, should be considered as part of understanding and responding to the burden of ill-health and promoting wellness.

Key principles underpinning local responses including:

- **Whole system approach** – no single agency can be left to address this by themselves; it needs input from all sectors including voluntary, statutory, employer and faith - as well as local neighbourhood action.
- **Population wide and lifecourse approach** – an evidence-based understanding of local need and interventions that target the whole population (including children and young people), populations at higher risk and people who need additional support (linking to wider work to support people in vulnerable circumstances during the outbreak).
- **Build on existing arrangements** – for example, mental health programmes for young people, multi-agency suicide prevention partnerships and bereavement networks. Also building on existing local and national resources that promote wellbeing and healthy ageing.
- **Good communication** both to professionals and to the public. Particularly aimed at reassurance and building resilience, including the role of councillors. Ensure strong system links so that organisations are aware of what support and advice is available locally through the community hubs and Local Resilience Forums and nationally from Government and sector representative bodies (ADPH, LGA). Highlight positive examples of communities coming together and supporting each other.

## **What councils are doing and further information**

There is a public mental health [Community of Practice](#) on the Knowledge Hub for public health practitioners and organisations with an interest in addressing the mental health impacts of COVID-19 to share what councils are doing, documents and connect with each other.

PHE has issued [Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) and [Guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)

PHE has updated the Every Mind Matters [platform](#) with specific advice on maintaining good mental wellbeing during the outbreak

[Young Minds](#) has produced tips, advice and information on where to get help during the COVID outbreak.

[Mind](#) resources on Coronavirus and wellbeing.

[WHO](#) advice 'mental health considerations during COVID-19 outbreak'

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has [prepared guidance](#) to help their members provide the best mental health services possible during the Covid-19

[The Institute of Health Visiting](#) has published COVID-19 Professional advice for Family Perinatal Mental Health

[Maternal Mental Health Alliance resources and support](#)

The Mental Health Foundation has published [How to look after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

LGA has a range of information on coronavirus for councils on their [website](#) and resources to support [workforce](#) mental wellbeing.