

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON COVID-19 & MENTAL HEALTH (For General Public)

Questions	Answers
<p>Are people with mental disorders, or those who abuse alcohol or other substances more likely to get COVID-19?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the person with the mental health condition is admitted in a psychiatric hospital, and if the hospital is crowded and the patients and the health care workers are not taking the right precautions, then the person with a mental health condition could be at increased risk of getting COVID-19 at the health facility. • If the person with the mental health condition is feeling restless and is not able to stay at home, they may put themselves at risk by moving up and down in the community, if there are people with COVID-19 in the community. • If the person goes out to drink alcohol or to use drugs with others, and they are not observing the right social distance, or they are in a confined space, they are putting themselves at risk for COVID-19. Sometimes those who use excessive amounts of alcohol may share the drinking straws, bottles or glasses, and this too can put them at increased risk for COVID-19. • There are also those who may have a severe mental disorder, who are taking medications called neuroleptics (sometimes called antipsychotics). These medications may cause the person to gain a lot of weight and put the person at increased risk for diabetes and hypertension. People with diabetes and hypertension have an increased risk for more severe symptoms when they get COVID-19.
<p>If someone has a mental disorder, what should they do to avoid getting COVID-19?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to take the precautions by following the advice that is disseminated by the health authorities. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limiting the amount of time that is spent outside of the home ▪ Washing hands frequently with soap and water, ▪ Carrying an alcohol based hand sanitizer to use any time a person touches door handles, or other objects outside of the home. ▪ If they have to go out in public, use a face mask and maintain at least a meter between themselves and others. ▪ They should avoid crowded places.
<p>If someone already has a pre-existing mental health condition, how can they protect/promote their mental well-being?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 increases stress for those who already have a mental health condition. It is therefore important for them to safeguard their mental wellbeing by doing the following: • Ensure that they are taking their medications as prescribed every day. • They should avoid too much contact with social media, especially the negative messages, or those that spread fear. They should avoid any information that appears to be conspiracy theories, as these can lead to relapse. They should read only messages or information from credible sources, such as the Ministry of Health, WHO or CDC, among others. • A person with a pre-existing mental health condition should try to exercise every day for at least 30 minutes. This can even be walking or marching on the spot for some time, doing jumping jacks, doing stretches, doing yoga, and so on. • The person with a mental health condition should try to get enough sleep. For an adult, this can be more or less, an average of 8 hours a night. Sleep

	<p>deprivation can trigger a relapse, inability to sleep can also be a sign of a relapse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person with a mental disorders should try to avoid sleeping too much. Too much sleep is not good for mental wellbeing. So when it is time to wake up, the person should get out of bed. Even when they do not have too much to do. • A person with a mental health condition should find ways to keep themselves occupied, such as reading a book, listening to music, chatting with friends and family, playing board games, helping with household chores, catching up with some tasks that may have been put off, taking up a new hobby, watching movies, and so on.
<p>What should someone with a pre-existing mental health condition do if they are not feeling well?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone with a pre-existing mental health condition is not feeling well, it is important to determine what it could be. It could be another illness, like malaria, it could be a relapse of the mental health condition, or it could be COVID-19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If it is a physical illness like malaria, or any other physical illness, it is important to go to the nearest health center as soon as possible where an examination will determine what the treatment should be. ▪ If it is a relapse of the mental health condition, then it is important to go as soon as possible to the health Unit where the Health Provider will determine if the medication has to be changed. The person with the mental health condition, or their family members should not make any changes to the medication. ▪ If it is suspected to be COVID-19, then they have to call the COVID-19 helpline as soon as possible or go to the COVID-19 treatment centres if there is no helpline. They should carry their mental health drugs as well as the medical records, so that the Health Care Workers can provide medications, should they run out. The person with the pre-existing mental health condition may need to also call their mental health care provider, so that the mental health care provider can liaise with the COVID-19 health care workers to ensure the person with the pre-existing mental health condition gets the best possible care. Someone with depression or an anxiety disorder may feel like they cannot breathe and the chest is tight, it may be a panic attack. The person or a relative should call the helpline and they will be able to determine if it is COVID symptoms or if it is a panic attack, especially if there is no fever or any other symptoms.
<p>What should someone with a pre-existing mental health condition do about regular mental health clinic visits?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very important to maintain the regular mental health clinic visits. • In some countries, the community health workers check on people with chronic conditions in their communities, including those with mental health conditions. They also collect t regular medications for them. • Sometimes, those with stable and well controlled chronic conditions, such as mental disorders, are provided medication for two or three months, so they do not have to travel often to the clinic. All patients should inquire from the mental health provider if they are able to provide medications for two or three months. • In some countries, patients are allowed to make a phone call to their physician who can talk to the person with the pre-existing mental health condition and if the person is well, they can instruct a pharmacy to provide

	<p>the medications. This is for someone who has a chronic condition, such as epilepsy or depression or schizophrenia and they have been stable on their medications. In order to avoid a relapse, the dosage should not be adjusted by the person with the disorder or the pharmacist.</p>
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