

Support for your people through the International Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak

Over the past couple of decades, we have experienced a number of diseases that have received global attention, including SARS, swine flu, equine flu, Influenza A and now the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19). Although these outbreaks have become part of life, it is common to feel fear when we are told that a virus is deadly. Our brains can sometimes feel scrambled as we try and make sense of a situation that doesn't actually feel or appear normal.

At AccessEAP, our clinical team have put together some tips to help you support your people to deal with the anxiety they may be experiencing.

- **Tip 1.** Resist the urge to inflate the risk. Inflating risk is part of our fight or flight stress response and is our brain's way of trying to keep us safe. When you think about it - it makes a lot of sense. When a situation is big and overwhelming, it gets our attention and forces us to act. Clinicians call this *catastrophising*. But if we reduce the inflation of the risk, we can start to look at the facts which may tell us that this virus is deadly, but there is a similar risk that the garden variety flu may have on us. This means that the common flu may just be as harmful as Covid-19 and the ability to frame how to cope with this new anxiety might require the same skills and approach we use to cope with other everyday events that also come with risk.
- **Tip 2.** Take common-sense precautions. We are all aware of what everyday health precautions are. However, we are not always good at following them closely and consistently. Both the flu and Coronavirus are spread through touch, saliva or a sneeze/cough. As advised by WHO and the Department of Health if you are unwell, consider ways you can reduce spreading the virus to others. If you have symptoms, book yourself in to see a GP at your earliest convenience. Hand hygiene is important – remember to sing your favourite song's chorus (twice) as you wash your hands under hot soapy water, particularly before meal preparation or eating. Consistently practising strong personal hygiene habits may also help keep any stress about germs at bay if you are someone who lives and works with other people. If you are unable to get to a sink, you can always carry hand sanitizer. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and use a tissue. Freshen up on these precautions at <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov#prevention>
- **Tip 3.** Look after yourself. Basic health habits like frequent exercise, a healthy diet, avoiding alcohol and tobacco, focusing on your stress management and adequate sleep are generally believed to increase immunity and reduce the risk of contracting the illness and can shorten the severity and duration of symptoms. These are good wellbeing habits to develop.
- **Tip 4.** Avoid or minimise watching sensationalised media about the virus outbreak. The more that you watch these types of stories, the more you will think about it, which will increase feelings of anxiety. Be wary about where you get your news from in times such as this. Visit a website that is known to be credible and bases its information on research (an example would be the Australian Government's advice on Coronavirus (<https://www.health.gov.au/news/coronavirus-update-at-a-glance>) and/or the World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/>)).



- **Tip 5.** Finally, look at how you have coped in the past. Clinicians believe that no matter what the focus of your anxiety is, using what you have done in the past to help manage those feelings will help. This could mean engaging in less black and white thinking, meditation, positive self-talk, de-escalating the irrational fears with fact-based responses or listening to music when the stress rises. It could also mean talking to a trusted friend about your current feelings or perhaps engaging a professional here at AccessEAP to talk it through.

Doing whatever works to help relieve your stress and reduce your anxiety will create a sense of coping. We encourage you to practice the skills that work for you in times like this when you feel like the stress of this virus outbreak is getting to you. Remember, outbreaks like this do occur from time to time throughout the world. It's normal. Learning to live within an uncertain world is a skill that we can all learn (and relearn if necessary).

For more information call us on **1800 818 728** or visit our website, accesseap.com.au.

