Homewood Health

Health Risk Services Inc.
"Providing Your Innovative Benefits Solutions"

The COVID-19 Pandemic:
Managing the Impact (Spring / Summer 2021)

You have been given this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members due to the continuing concerns and questions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

As governments and health officials at all levels maneuver through the evolving pandemic, various regions have enacted revised guidelines and protocols to minimize the complications and difficulties we face with the onset of second and third waves of COVID-19.

Further challenges created by new variants and confusion surrounding vaccines have caused some individuals to experience continued or amplified difficulty with mental health, anxiety, depression and fear. It's normal during this time of uncertainty for us to speculate on the potential spread, resulting in understandable reactions from worry to anxiety.

Possible Reactions

When we are uncertain about the health and safety of those we care about, we experience a range of reactions varying in degrees of intensity. We all react differently, yet we may experience common reactions including but not limited to:

- **Emotional reactions.** Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, and uncertainty.
- **Mental reactions.** Disbelief related to the extent and duration of the pandemic, loss of concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness and fearful thoughts related to travel and media coverage.
- **Physical reactions.** Numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, persistent heart palpitations, fatigue, nausea, and gastrointestinal problems.
- **Behavioural reactions.** Excessive vigilance, withdrawal or isolation, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, and increased consumption of alcohol or medication as a coping mechanism.

Managing the Impact

Evolving Challenges and New Norms

Organizations at all levels have endured challenges throughout the past several months and will continue to be affected as the number of new cases continues to rise. Moving forward, employers may face additional obstacles as employees may require continuing or new forms of support as the pandemic continues.

Additionally, as we surpass one year of evolving challenges related to COVID-19 and our personal lives, including the disturbances that many have encountered, the impact on daily life has been profound. As we move forward, it's important to remind yourself that continuing precautions and safety practices are essential in managing the risk of infection – including adoption and adherence to revised distancing guidelines, social gathering restrictions and mandatory mask mandates where applicable.

Fatigue, Isolation and Loneliness

As the pandemic continues, we understand that self-isolation and physical distancing are necessary realities. In almost all instances, families have sacrificed milestone celebrations, traditions and the ability to express remorse and support when faced with unfortunate events. As we adopt and implement modifications to our routines, these changes can be linked to psychological effects including feelings of fatigue, isolation, and loneliness.

For those who have transitioned to working remotely, employers and employees have had to adapt to endless challenges. Unable to partake in face to face meetings, as well as having limited social interactions with colleagues may have many feeling isolated. Additionally, essential workers and those who have continued working onsite my also experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. New physical environments, limited opportunities for interaction combined with safety measures, may all contribute to growing feelings of isolation. Maintaining good communication with your co-workers is essential in combating fatigue and isolation, and promotes stronger remote work arrangements.

Whether you're in quarantine because you have contracted the virus, or isolating to do your part in slowing the spread, being confined to your home with a decrease in social activities can take a toll on your mental health. Everyone will experience loneliness differently, it is a personal experience. Those not accustomed to extended periods of time away from others, or those who covet social interactions may experience extreme feelings of loneliness. Regardless of your position, all feelings are valid. Remember you are not the only one feeling this way. Now more than ever, there is less reason to feel any shame or apprehension about loneliness.

Vaccine Anxiety

Rumours about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines have been circulating on social media for months and with some vaccines recently making headlines over potential risks, public anxiety about receiving COVID-19 vaccines—or vaccine hesitancy—has been expressed.

It's understandable that you may be wary of receiving one of the approved vaccines. It has been a year filled with rapid change, fear, uncertainty, grief and loss. We've been inundated with information about COVID-19 and our lives have been impacted in so many ways.

The speed at which COVID-19 vaccines were developed may be cause apprehension that vaccine development was rushed and safety may have been compromised. These worries can create skepticism which may affect your decision about receiving a vaccine. These concerns are natural. However, it is important to look to the science and facts, rather than to follow gossip and "fake news" on social media. The risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19 far outweighs risks from vaccines. Across the globe, over 476 million people have received at least one dose of a vaccine at the time that this article was written.

With all vaccines—as with all medications—there's a chance for serious side effects, including allergic reactions, but these are rare. Speak to your healthcare professional before you receive the vaccine if you have serious allergies or known allergies to ingredients in the vaccines.

Managing the Impact

Managing Stress and Anxiety

As we navigate uncharted territory and the evolving realities of COVID-19, we may experience stress and anxiety due to the overwhelming volume of information and the demands being put in place to combat the spread and risk of infection.

Anxiety is highly common and is often triggered by specific events, trauma or stressful scenarios creating challenges in our daily activities and interactions. Stress results from normal reactions, where adjustments or a response is required, causing our mind and bodies to react with physical, mental or emotional actions.

People who may respond more strongly to stress and/or anxiety include elderly populations, people with chronic diseases and front-line or essential service workers including but not limited to:

- Physicians, nurses, and health care providers
- First responders, workers who interact with the general public; and
- Persons with mental health and/or addiction disorders including substance abuse

We all react differently to stressful situations. Given our diverse backgrounds and the communities we live in, our beliefs and behaviours may vary. What can you do to stay calm during this period of uncertainty?

- Be aware of your mental health. Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions rather than the event itself.
- Reach out to your support system via text, telephone or through virtual conferencing.
- Create a daily routine. Establish a schedule and keep up with daily hygiene, chores and cleaning practices.
- Don't judge or blame yourself. Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions.
- Avoid saturation. Manage your media and online intake and try and focus on something else.
- Find something to help distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy with hobbies, routine chores or physical exercise.
- Take time to rest and relax. Maintain good sleep habits, take time for yourself and practice taking deep breaths, or meditation.

Managing the Impact

Cumulative Stress and Building Resiliency

The duration and complexity of the pandemic combined with changing protocols and guidelines at both professional and personal levels brings new and unique challenges. The impact you feel and experience may be a result of cumulative stress.

Cumulative stress has been defined as a common experience for people who work in chronically stressful situations. It results from an accumulation of various stress factors such as heavy workload, poor communications, multiple frustrations, coping with situations in which you feel powerless, and the inability to rest or relax. Prolonged and negative stress stimulates the level of stress hormones that can impact your emotions, your thoughts and even your physiological responses. Experiencing cumulative stress for a prolonged duration of time can have a nagging effect on your well-being impacting everything from decision making to your immune system.

Resilience is an important quality in today's evolving COVID-19 landscape. Resiliency is the ability to face life's challenges, cope with disruptive change and catastrophe and the ability to rebound from setbacks without acting or responding in dysfunctional ways.

We benefit from resiliency in many ways, including how to endure tough times and become stronger individuals. While some seem to be naturally resilient, many of us have to build our resilience. Try the following:

- Create a support system. Having a network with whom you can share feelings, discuss problems and receive advice is an essential part of weathering life's ups and downs.
- Be an optimist. Try to see the positive in every situation and remain hopeful and excited about what life has to offer. Negativity is contagious, try to surround yourself with positive people and relationships.
- Accept change. We can't fight change. It's part of life. It may be disruptive, but if you adapt rather than resist, you'll feel happier and less stressed. Resilience involves finding creative solutions to adverse situations and remaining calm in times of turmoil.
- Learn from failure. Use setbacks to develop better coping, problem solving or people skills. Be willing to take risks and learn from your experiences. Construct a list of what you did right, and areas for improvement.
- Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your mental, physical and emotional health. Look after your well-being, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, adopt positive reinforcement and thinking, and find time to do things you enjoy.

Wellness Together Canada

During these complicated times, it is critical that Canadians obtain reliable information and access to mental health, addiction and well-being support services.

On April 15th, 2020, Health Canada launched the Wellness Together Canada portal, providing direct access to peer support workers, social workers, psychologists and other professional care providers for all Canadians.

On June 15th, 2020, Wellness Together Canada launched a national awareness campaign called #Take That Step. The campaign serves as a reminder that free support for mental health and substance use is available to all ages through the online Wellness Together Canada platform.

Homewood Health is proud to be a key contributor to this continuing initiative. If you know someone struggling and requiring support during these difficult times, please share the link below.

https://ca.portal.gs/?lang=en-ca

Managing the Impact

Should I stay home from work?

If you're feeling ill, unwell or concerned, the best thing to do is speak to your manager, HR or occupational health and safety department within your organization. They're there to help.

Where can I get more information on COVID-19?

Here are some helpful links to gather more information.

Health Canada:
https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html

World Health Organization:
https://www.who.int/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
https://www.cdc.gov/

For those persons who may be concerned they may have symptoms of COVID-19, the federal government has created an online self-assessment tool. You will be asked a series of questions and dependent upon the responses and symptoms identified, the tool will provide advice, giving one of the following actions:

- Visit an emergency room
- Call telehealth
- Self-isolate at home

The tool can be accessed here:
https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en

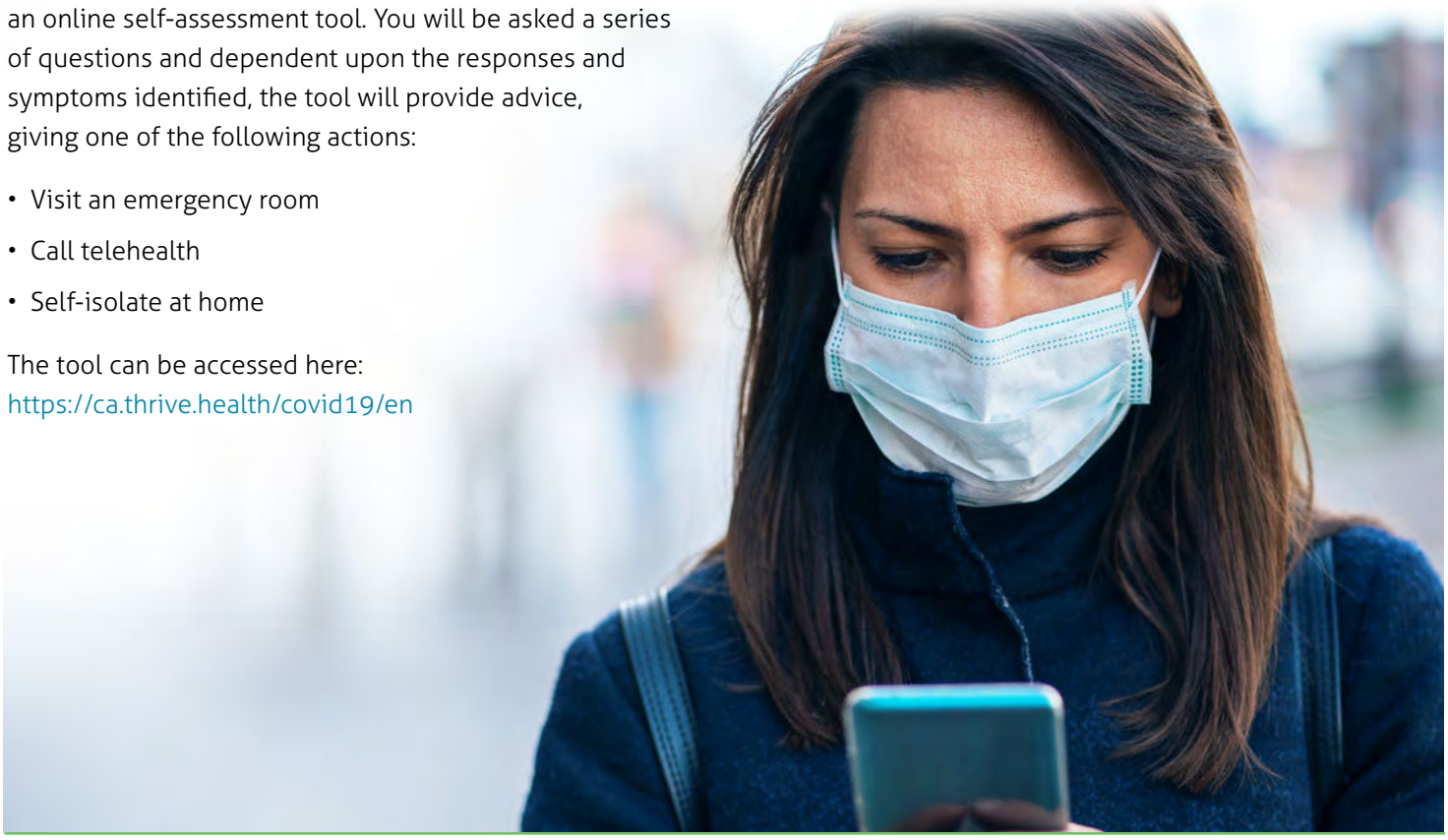
I feel very stressed about all of this. Should I still reach out to Homewood Health?

Absolutely. We are here for you 24/7/365 and will help get you the tools, resources and/or support you're looking for.

What if I was already seeing a counsellor or have an upcoming appointment? How will I know what to do next?

You will be contacted shortly by the person you were seeing, or by Homewood Health, and we'll make the process really clear and simple for you so you understand how you will connect with the counsellor for your session.

Homewood Health would like to extend our thanks and express our gratitude to all first responders and health care workers, including those in public facing positions. We appreciate your efforts and support to help others during these difficult times.



Health Risk Services has been a proud partner of Homewood Health for several years. They provide our clients with the value added service of health related information, articles, advice and personal counseling.

We would be pleased to assist you and your family with any benefit plan questions you may have.

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Homewood Health | Santé

COVID-19: Crisis Management Services

CMS Telephonic and Video Support Options

Option 1

Outreach Calls. For a CMS response, Customers can also reach out to our CMS team and provide a list of impacted employees, their phone numbers and verbal consent to receive a call back from one of our CMS clinicians. This is reserved for impacted employees showing signs of distress, risk factors, First Responders, or any high need population during this pandemic.

Option 2

Standby. Customers can also reach our CMS team to 'virtually deploy' one or more CMS provider(s) for blocks of time to be available for employees via telephonic calls. This would be set up by the Customer, and the Employee would call our CMS crisis line to be transferred to a provider or book the next telephonic availability in a confidential manner.

Option 3

Telephonic Groups. The Crisis Management Services program will continue to offer a group support option for impacted teams. A dedicated conference line will be arranged to support a maximum of 10 employees for each group session, facilitated by one of our crisis management clinicians.

Option 4

Video Support. Customers can also request video support, whether it's for individual or group options, with a maximum of 10 attendees. Video support for CMS can be initiated by calling the CSC line and requesting to speak with the Crisis Management Services (CMS) team.

Option 5

In-Person Support. This will be on a case-by-case basis to be vetted by Homewood Health management. This is subject to change.

Please note, for urgent and immediate needs, employees should be encouraged to contact our 24/7 call centre. Employees can request to speak with a First Call Care (FCC) clinician or crisis counsellor. FCC is a separate service, free of charge and not part of the CMS service offering.

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