



Press Statement
30th March 2020

Continued Support, Flexibility and Guidance Needed for those with Mental Illness and Neurodevelopmental Conditions during Coronavirus Outbreak

Vulnerable groups with mental illness and neurodevelopment conditions need extra guidance, support and flexibility in how services and treatments are delivered in these extraordinary circumstances, highlights the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland. It is vital that people with these conditions continue to engage with their mental health practitioners and services during this Coronavirus outbreak period.

Covid-19 is stressful for all of us. The combination of uncertainty, risk of serious illness and social isolation poses challenges for all of us, but particularly for those with existing mental illness. The [HSE](#) and other groups have excellent guidance and reminders for all on how to look after their mental health and manage anxiety, emotions and behaviour in this unfamiliar and distressing time.

The College of Psychiatrists is acutely aware of the additional impact these times are having, and will have, on those who live with mental illness and neurodevelopment conditions as well as on their families, loved ones and carers.

Treatment and support are still imperative for many but may be delivered in a different way when necessary to comply with the Covid-19 practices that minimise the spread and damage of the virus.

Dr Maeve Doyle, Director of Communication and Public Education for the College points out,

'It is essential that people with mental illness continue to connect with their mental health service and practitioners for appointments, planned necessary supports and for additional support and advice, particularly when the Covid-19 situation is causing exacerbation of their symptoms and worsening of their condition.'

Many children and adults with neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism, those with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and Tourette's Syndrome, may find the Covid-19 public health restrictions particularly challenging and could see a worsening of anxiety and OCD symptoms'.

She also noted that,

'People with Anxiety Disorders, Depression and Psychosis for instance, may be particularly affected by the increased stress and concern around the pandemic as well as restrictions of social isolation and other recommended behaviours'

Dr Doyle stressed that

'The most important message is that Mental Health Services continue to operate. Many Mental Health Services and individual mental health professionals have already adapted their method of delivery of support. Many are using telephone contact, some are using video consultation and some are still carrying out face to face appointments but with the necessary social distancing and other Covid-19 practices in place.'

The College has developed a [Covid-19 section on its website](#) with updates for members and psychiatry trainees as well as a general section on useful resources for health practitioners and the general public.

The College urges people to take the advice from the WHO (World Health Organisation) in their [‘Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak’](#) document which is particularly helpful for certain vulnerable groups. See excerpts from it below.

Ends

Excerpts from the **WHO (World Health Organisation)** **‘Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak’**

Communication with people with certain disabilities.

Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities.

Where possible, include forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information.

Medication for Mental Illness and Mental Health conditions

Ensure availability of essential, generic psychotropic medications at all levels of health care’.

‘People living with long-term mental health conditions or epileptic seizures will need uninterrupted access to their medication, and sudden discontinuation should be avoided.

Supporting and Helping Children and their mental health during Covid-19

Help children find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his or her own way of expressing emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing or drawing can facilitate this process.

Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

Maintain Family Unit

Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe, and avoid separating children and their careers as much as possible.

If a child needs to be separated from his or her primary carer, ensure that appropriate alternative care is provided and that a social worker or equivalent will regularly follow up on the child.

Further, ensure that during periods of separation, regular contact with parents and carers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled telephone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g. social media).

Routines for children

Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, or create new routines, especially if children must stay at home. Provide engaging age-appropriate activities for children, including activities for their learning.

Where possible, encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family when advised to restrict social contact.

Older Age Adults and those with Dementia

Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine.

Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.

People with other health conditions

If you have an underlying health condition, make sure to have access to any medications that you are currently using.

Activate your social contacts to provide you with assistance, if needed.

Be prepared and know in advance where and how to get practical help if needed, like calling a taxi, having food delivered and requesting medical care.

Make sure you have up to two weeks of all your regular medicines that you may require.

General for all

Learn simple daily physical exercises to perform at home, in quarantine or isolation so you can maintain mobility and reduce boredom.

Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting or other activities.

Keep in regular contact with loved ones (e.g. via telephone, e-mail, social media or video conference).

During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.

Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective.