

Dear Community Members,

Your emotional well-being is so important right now. Updates about the Coronavirus affecting our cities may give rise to feelings of stress, anxiety, and worries about the future. These are very normal reactions because it is close to home. Naturally, all of us are absorbing some level of anxiety about this new pathogen. Contributing to the stress is the question of whether we are facing an acute or a chronic situation. Not knowing how long to plan for potential disruption to our lives is much harder than working within set time limits.

However, if we let ourselves get overwhelmed by anxiety, we will be less able to manage, process, and work together on what is yet to come. In addition to following the CDC's recommendations to help control the spread of the virus, it's also important to talk about the psychological toll of living in such an uncertain time—and how we can work together to manage our discomfort.

Here are some strategies to help us cope with anxiety and lessen the chances we let our fears keep us from being proactive, rational, and kind to each other:

- Let's encourage each other to utilize our **daily self-care practices**, including regular breaks, routine sleep, and checking in with our support systems when we're confused or uncertain. Feeling productive, informed, and supported by each other will decrease the possibility of the spread of panic.
- **Increase your feel-good activities!** Whether it's mindfulness, going for walks, being in nature, playing sports, gym-time, lifting weights, journaling, or Netflix, now's the time to intentionally increase positive experiences on the daily. Download wellness apps such as Daylio, Headspace, Calm, and Shine which can help set goals, track mood, monitor progress, and implement helpful habits.
- **Stay healthy.** Eating balanced meals, exercising, and reducing alcohol will help boost your immune system and help you prevent illness. A healthy body can ALSO have a positive impact on our thoughts and emotions. High-impact exercise can help reduce the excess adrenaline build-up associated with anxiety.
- **Maintain focus on ongoing goals and stay oriented about the future.** Sometimes this will feel like "business as usual" and that is OK given we may be managing the spread of the virus for weeks, maybe even months. For many of us, maintaining our normal routines will help keep us positive, balanced, and mentally well.
- **Examine your reactions.** If you find yourself stressed about COVID-19, you are not alone. It's highly unlikely that a viral outbreak, even at pandemic levels, will trigger mental health problems in people WHO DON'T ALREADY HAVE THEM. Keep in mind that people who have pre-existing anxiety conditions are the most vulnerable because they face a higher risk of worsening mental health as the virus spreads. This should not be ignored. For those of us with histories of anxiety problems, it's best to form a plan, in advance, on how we can effectively meet our mental health needs such as accessing health workers, counselors, and prescriptions.

- **Don't isolate yourself.** Personal relationships are crucial in maintaining perspective, elevating mood, and allowing distraction away from concerns that trouble us. Find ways to connect even while you're staying 6 feet away from each other.
- **Talk about other things.** What are you binge-watching? What's on your top must-watch list? Getting our minds on some common interests will actually dampen the stress response system and feel temporary relief from the rapid news cycle.
- **Limit your media exposure.** Decrease the frequency of notifications or use filters in your social media. Constant searching, scrolling or consumption of Coronavirus reporting will only make us feel more afraid and powerless. Remember to take breaks from media coverage and use one or two news sources for updates rather than checking unreliable, unofficial sites.
- **Panic is contagious.** We may begin to notice people stockpiling toilet paper, bottled water, and sanitizer, leaving shelves empty and some of us spiraling into a panic. We should check the facts before copy-catting the folks in our feeds—plan ahead but consider the needs of others in our community. Please don't let your panic override your sense of compassion.
- **Stay home if you're sick.** This cannot be overstated. It's likely you have the common cold or flu, but working while sick not only worries the people around you, it slows down your recovery.
- **Treat everyone with dignity and respect.** Let's work together to address xenophobic sentiments and behaviors that perpetuate hatred and stigma toward persons from the countries impacted by the spread of the Coronavirus. In fact, Asian members of our community are experiencing additional stress right now because of the increased suspicion, avoidance, and direct racism felt from others who misguidedly associate their cultural backgrounds with a contagious illness.
- **Have peace of mind** that health and medical experts know what they're doing. A lot of us do not trust the government right now. But please, PLEASE, trust the scientists. The World Health Organization (WHO) reminds communities that the Coronavirus can be significantly slowed or even reversed through robust containment and control activities. Health and wellness leadership at top institutions in our country are vigorously pursuing many strategies proven effective to stop, contain, control, delay and even reduce the impact of this virus at every opportunity. Each of us has the capacity to contribute, to protect ourselves and to protect others in the workplace by following their recommended guidelines.

Finally, **check in with YOUR EMPLOYER** about what you're experiencing and ASK QUESTIONS at work. High levels of emotional distress, whatever the source, should be appropriately and compassionately attended to, particularly if it is impacting anyone's ability to concentrate, to stay motivated, and to secure comfort in their work.

Be Well,

Dr. Drea Letamendi
UCLA Resilience Center