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Minding mental health in the time of COVID-19

As COVID-19 pandemic sweeps across the globe, it is causing widespread concern, fear and stress in the population at large and among certain groups in particular, such as older adults, caregivers and people with underlying health conditions.

These can be difficult times for the people as they hear about the spread of COVID-19 through television, social media, newspapers and other sources. Being concerned about the news is understandable, but for many it can make existing mental health problems worse.

Lockdown and social distancing do have negative connotations. Isolation and loneliness can exacerbate anxiety

Testing at NIMHANS Lab

The BSL-3 laboratory at NIMHANS has received approval from Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for testing COVID-19 samples. The lab has a capacity to test 96 samples a day.

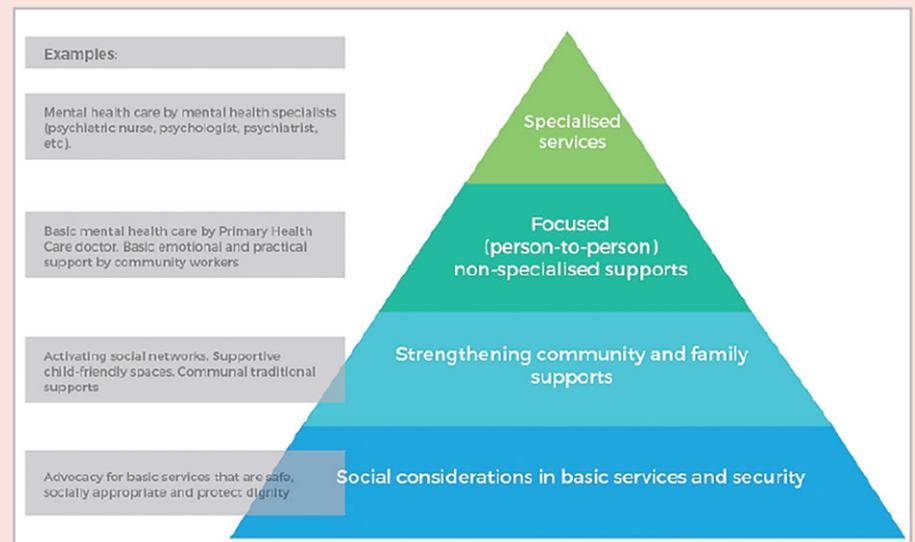
With this, four government-approved labs in the city — NIV unit at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Chest Diseases (RGICD), and the VRDL labs at the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, Command Hospital, and NIMHANS — will test COVID-19 samples for free.

COVID-19 Cases	Confirmed	Deaths
India	4067	109
Karnataka	151	4

* as on 6 April 2020 (9.00 am)

Intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support

The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings recommends that multiple levels of interventions be integrated within outbreak response activities. These levels align with a spectrum of mental health and psychosocial needs and are represented in a pyramid of interventions ranging from embedding social and cultural considerations in basic services, to providing specialised services for individuals with more severe conditions.



Source: Interim Briefing Note on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of Covid-19 Outbreak (Version 1.5), IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings

and depression, and even impact physical health. Thus, it is important to stay connected with family and friends over the phone or other online mode and reach out for support when needed, even as in-person socializing is cut back.

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others

around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Apart from recognising their own mental health problems, people should be sensitive to such problems in their near and dear ones, which may include changes in sleep patterns, difficulty in sleeping and concentrating, worsening of health problems, and increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

At times of anxiety, deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress

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A stitch in time...

Tailoring Section, functioning under the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (PRS), has been tasked with stitching masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for hospital personnel.

Professional tailors, family members of NIMHANS' staff, former employees, housewives, and various organizations including CRPF-GF, Yelahanka have volunteered and banded together to stitch PPE and masks at NIMHANS. A half-day training was provided to all the volunteers, at the start of the activity, by the instructors at the tailoring unit.

A total of 50 PPE and 2700 masks (white and green) have been prepared so far with the help of 15 Staff and 12 volunteers. The staff and volunteers have been working overtime and on holidays to complete the task.

Message from the Registrar

In this time of COVID-19 crisis, it is vital to keep you informed and confident in the capabilities of NIMHANS.

The faculty, staff and students of the Institute have been striving relentlessly to ensure that we are all set to help no matter how mild or severe the situation becomes.

The Union Government has taken decisive steps to lockdown and use other countermeasures that will slow down the transmission of the virus to a manageable rate. Withal, NIMHANS is developing effective strategies to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak.

I reckon with the steps we have initiated and the understanding of

the importance of social distancing, I am hopeful we will be able to break the chain and flatten the curve. However, we all have to join hands and make concerted efforts to make the biggest impact.

The situation is constantly evolving, and we get new information and guidelines almost every day as we gain more understanding of COVID-19 and how it affects the community.

It is clear that the coming weeks will be crucial and have many challenges. With rational and focused efforts, we can and will be able to tide over the Coronavirus pandemic to the absolute best of our collective abilities.

Dr. K. Sekar

NIMHANS among World's Best Hospitals 2020

Newsweek international magazine has named NIMHANS as one of the World's Best Hospitals for 2020.

The World's Best Hospitals ranking identifies and honours the very best hospitals around the globe, in 21 countries: USA, Canada, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Israel, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, India, Thailand, Australia and Brazil.

Newsweek partnered with global data research company Statista

Inc. to rank the leading hospitals in 21 countries. The ranking is based on patient survey results, key medical performance indicators and recommendations from medical experts, including physicians, hospitals managers and other healthcare professionals. Newsweek and Statista developed a complex methodology to ensure the quality and validity of the ranking.

Founded in 1933, Newsweek is a global news magazine that provides coverage and analysis of the major events shaping the world.





- A dedicated team of doctors, nursing officers and support staff has been sensitised regarding the handling of COVID-19 cases, so that their services can be utilised at any point of time.
- OPD services have been temporarily withdrawn, until further notice. All nonessential elective procedures and surgeries have been postponed.
- Casualty and short stay wards have been de-congested, and vacant beds in other wards utilised as required.
- Psycho-social Support and Mental Health (PSSMH) services have been initiated to address mental health and psychosocial needs. A toll-free 24/7 national helpline (080-46110007) has been launched to help people deal with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues during the lockdown.



Screening protocol being administered at the Emergency Block

- Adequate quantity of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), masks, sanitizers, handheld thermometers, etc., are being procured and provided to the designated places.
- Emergency Services are functioning 24 x 7 uninterruptedly. The services have been enhanced by posting additional staff and residents for better triaging and reducing congestion.
- Laboratory and diagnostic/imaging services continue to function, as any services related to the national effort to mitigate COVID-19.
- Inter-departmental services like ECT to be continued/stopped as per the joint decision of all stake holder departments.
- Staff members living outside the campus are instructed to travel to work in their personal vehicles, and compulsorily carry their office-issued identity cards.
- Canteen has been closed until further notice. The mess in hostel (Kabini) is operating on a cash and carry basis, for staff and students not residing in the hostel. All students are encouraged to take away food and avoid dining in large groups.
- Cleaning of surfaces regularly, followed by disinfection, is being practiced in all areas/sections of the hospital.
- Hygiene measures have been effectively implemented across all the departments and sections as per the prescribed guidelines.
- The Heads of Clinical Departments are instructed to minimise the movement of residents to different wards, where feasible.
- Plans are afoot to initiate home delivery of medications to patients availing free medications from the hospital, by engaging volunteers and/or Psychiatric Social Work staff.



COVID-19 PSSMH Services Control Room

- All seminars/workshops/conferences have been postponed indefinitely. Departmental teaching programmes to be conducted using Zoom Video Communications or other tele services to ensure training needs and attendance are met.
- Exams scheduled for April 2020 stand postponed. Thesis and dissertation submission deadline extended till June 2020, before the theory exams.
- The Heads of the Departments may permit students living outside campus to work from home. All heads of the departments must ensure that at least 50% of their staff is available at work at all times.
- Face-recognition method has been introduced to register



NIMHANS staff and students lit lamps and expressed solidarity in the fight against COVID-19

- attendance instead of contact-based biometric system to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.
- First online PhD class conducted with 100% student attendance. Online training on PPE for BSc Radiography students was held on 31 March.
- Monthly meeting of the Heads of the Departments was held online, through Webex videoconferencing application on 1 April.
- 'NIMHANS Family' lit lamps and expressed solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (on 5 April, at 9 pm) at the call of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.
- Disciplinary action to be taken against any employee spreading false information with respect to COVID-19, under the Epidemics Act.



NIMHANS staff and volunteers sewing masks and PPE

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in the body. When feeling angry and irritated, calming the mind, counting back from 10 to 1, distracting oneself also helps. If anxiety and intense emotions persist continuously for several days, despite trying to get out of it, the person should talk about it with someone. If the feelings worsen, the person may feel helpless, hopeless and think that life is not worth living. If that happens, the person should make use of the helplines and take advice from mental health professionals.

Avoiding tobacco, alcohol and other drugs is strictly advised. Use of substances to cope with emotions or boredom can worsen physical, mental

health and reduce immunity. People who already have a substance use problem may require professional help, especially when they feel low in mood or stressed.

Persons who have had previous mental illness may face newer challenges during self-isolation or COVID-19 infection. They would also have the same fears and stress as others which may worsen their previous mental health condition. Social isolation may make them more withdrawn, moody and irritable. They may not seek/ get easy access to medicines and counselling. Help and support is vital for persons with mental illness from their families and

other caregivers. Health helplines can provide support, in addition to regular taking of prescribed medication, a regular daily routine, keeping engaged and positive.

NIMHANS has come up with a number of initiatives to tackle psychosocial and mental health issues arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic and national helpline (08046110007) is an important component of the same. The toll-free 24/7 helpline has been launched to help people deal with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues during lockdown. ■



ACTION TIMELINE

11-03-2020 & 12-03-2020	Sensitization Programme on COVID-19 held by Dr. V. Ravi, Sr. Professor of Neurovirology, for faculty, staff and students of NIMHANS.
13-03-2020	Precautionary measures announced by the Govt. of Karnataka regarding public gatherings and closure of public spaces.
13-03-2020	Educational materials and videos prepared by Department of Mental Health Education, displayed at OPD and waiting areas.
14-03-2020	Continuing Medical Education (CME) programmes cancelled until further notice.
16-03-2020	Emergency meeting convened at the Director's Office – SOPs for prevention of COVID-19 transmission were formulated and circulated to all departments for implementation.
17-03-2020	COVID-19 screening protocol for all patients and attendants visiting OPD and casualty were initiated. Entry of patients restricted—only one attendant is allowed with the patient. Hand sanitization made mandatory for all public entering OPD. All departments formulated their respective precautions against COVID-19.
19-03-2020	Advisory for patients planning to visit OPD was prepared and publishing of NIMHANS Bulletin work initiated.
20-03-2020	Display of information regarding advisory to patients visiting OPD in Kannada and English, to reduce overcrowding. Information circulated to all newspapers and media channels.
21-03-2020	Emergency meeting held to discuss Mock Drill for emergency response for handling COVID-19 cases and other vital measures, as per the directions of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
21-03-2020	OPD online appointments suspended till 21-04-2020.
22-03-2020	Mock Drill for emergency response for handling COVID-19 cases conducted.
23-03-2020	First edition of NIMHANS Bulletin brought out.
24-03-2020	COVID-19 Emergency Meeting and Action Group Meeting convened to implement urgent measures related to COVID-19.
26-03-2020	All OPD services (including special clinics) closed until further notice.
28-03-2020	COVID-19 national helpline for psychosocial support and mental health services launched.
01-04-2020	Summer vacation for faculty, scheduled to commence from 15-04-2020, cancelled in view of the lockdown and exigencies of the Institute services.
03-04-2020	Guidelines issued for effective implementation of continuum of care programme for psychiatry. Webinar on the Telemedicine Practice Guidelines, notified by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, by Dr. Suresh Bada Math, Head of Forensic Psychiatry Services.

Taking care of Mental Health of Children during COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID -19 and its consequences can make children anxious and stressed. Take care of their mental health with these simple strategies.

PROVIDE ASSURANCE WHENEVER NEEDED

It is important to reassure your children. Listen to their concerns and try answering their queries related to the outbreak. Spend quality time with them and give them the attention they need. Reading them stories to put them to sleep will make them feel loved.



KEEP THEM IN CONTACT WITH THEIR FRIENDS

Physical distancing from friends can be a cause of distress for the children. Encourage them to talk to their friends, cousins and loved ones by calling them up or through video calls. You can also involve your children and their friends in some fun activities which they can do together by staying connected virtually.



MANAGE YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY

It is normal for your child to become anxious at this time. Look out for the emotional cues in your child and talk to them regarding the same. Avoid being judgemental when they express their feelings. Do not avoid their questions related to COVID or speak to them harshly. This can increase their fear and anxiety. Instead, make them understand that things will be better if we take proper care. Remember that this is a new situation for your children and do not get irritated with them.



GIVE THEM CLEAR INFORMATION

It is not advisable to provide children with a lot of reports and news related to the outbreak. However it is important to give them correct information as to what is happening around the world. Give them proper facts in a way that they can understand so that they do not remain confused, as this may increase their anxiety. You can make the explanations creative through pictures and drawings.



ENGAGE THEM IN INDOOR ACTIVITIES

During this time, children may get easily bored. Involve them in indoor games to cut down the boredom. You can also make their learning fun by giving them puzzles to solve and teaching them crafts. Encourage them to pick up a hobby. Involve the children in some stretching exercises, yoga or dancing which they will enjoy. You can also involve them in doing simple household activities to keep them engaged.



MAKE A ROUTINE OF LEARNING AT HOME

At this time, schools are closed, however this should not stop the children from learning. Ensure that they have a regular habit of studying by giving them small assignments related to their lessons. Check the assignments to understand their progress.



Above all, take good care of your children's health. Ensure that they practise hand washing and cover their mouth and nose with bent elbow when they cough or sneeze. Watch out for any symptoms of COVID-19 and reach out to the doctor if necessary. Have a plan in advance in case your child falls sick. Ensure that the children eat healthy food and get good sleep and rest.

IN CASE YOU NEED ANY HELP

Please contact COVID -19 Psycho social toll free helpline at 080-46110007 or consult your doctor or a mental health professional

Taking care of Mental Health of elderly during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 outbreak, all of us should take some extra time and care for ourselves. Follow some simple strategies to improve your well-being

SPEND TIME WITH FAMILY

Spending quality time with family and getting involved in family discussions, while staying at home during this period will help reduce anxiety and distress. Try to connect with your family members through phone call or video call if they stay far from you.



GETTING INVOLVED IN DAILY ACTIVITIES

Keep doing small activities at home to reduce boredom. Keeping yourself busy in the daily activities like gardening, cleaning and cooking will help reduce anxiety. If there is no other family member to help you, identify a support system to buy groceries, medicines and other essentials.



SPEND TIME ON RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

During this stressful time, it is important that you make some time for things you like. Engage in recreational activities like solving puzzles, playing some board games like carrom board or chess, listening to music, reading etc. These will help reduce boredom.



CONNECTING TO LOVED ONES

During this time, you might be worried about your loved ones such as children and grandchildren, who stay away from you. Connect with them once in a while through phone calls or video call to keep the stress at bay and for any emergencies.



MAKE SOME TIME FOR EXERCISE

It is important to be physically active. Simple stretching exercises, simple yoga postures, walking indoors or meditation will be beneficial not only for your physical health but also mental health.



CUT DOWN ON LISTENING TO NEWS

With the news of the pandemic everywhere, it is difficult to filter out reliable news. Do not watch news reports all the time as it may be upsetting and misleading. Seek information from credible sources like the website of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (mohfw.gov.in). In case of doubt, ask your loved ones.



Take special care of elderly persons in your family. Remind them to practice hand washing as often as possible. Make sure to tell them to cover their mouth and nose with bent elbow, when they cough or sneeze. Watch out for any symptoms of COVID-19 and reach out for medical help, if necessary. Make sure they eat healthy food and get good sleep.

IN CASE YOU NEED ANY HELP

Please contact COVID -19 Psycho social toll free helpline at 080-46110007 or consult your doctor or a mental health professional

Telemedicine Practice Guidelines, 2020



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxJmXjDcg&t=1185s>



<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmIwoW5oSDRRNpn-MDjAAsWuhu729iC9n>

Connecting with li'l ones during the #COVID19 stay-in'



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYD9bogtJlU>

Together we can fight Coronavirus

For further information:

Call **24/7 Toll-free Helpline Number 104 and 080-22208541** or
Union Ministry of Health, Govt. of India **24/7 Control Room Number**
+91-11-23978046

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