

## Handling Public Health Emergencies

The information in this brochure can help you identify and cope with anxiety related to public health emergencies.

It's natural to be upset when you think your health – or the health of your loved ones – may be threatened.

Public health alerts can have a powerful effect on people of all ages.

Pay attention to these feelings and take care of your own emotional needs. When you do, you can better help friends and family members handle their concerns.

### When We Don't Know For Sure

Anxiety is related to fear of the unknown. It is normal to feel anxious and worried about a spreading disease, especially if there is no known cause or cure.

Coping with your feelings during times of uncertainty can be challenging, but remember, you are not alone.

## All people react in their own way to a public health risk

Common reactions include:

### Physical

Headaches, tiredness  
Fast pulse, high blood pressure  
Changes in appetite  
Unexplained aches or pains  
Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much  
Stomach aches

### Emotional

Panic, anxiety  
Distrust, fear  
Anger, irritability  
Sadness, depression  
Blame  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Increased stress

### Mental

Difficulty concentrating  
Problems with work or school  
Memory problems  
Troubling thoughts that won't go away  
Concern about health issues

### Behavioral

Avoiding others  
Increased substance abuse  
Excessive cleaning or washing  
Being overly cautious, jumpiness

### When to Seek Professional Help

"When in doubt...reach out"

Disorientation...  
Inability to care for self...  
Suicidal or Homicidal Thoughts...  
Problematic use of Alcohol / Drugs...  
Domestic Violence, Child / Elder Abuse

## Here are some ways you can cope with stress and anxiety:

- Limit your exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from reliable sources
- Educate yourself about the specific health hazard
- Maintain your normal daily routine, as much as possible
- You are a survivor - Focus on your strengths and abilities
- Exercise, eat well and rest
- Stay active – physically and mentally
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Talk with someone about your feelings even if it's difficult
- Find strength and comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Find healthy ways to express your feelings

## Stay Connected

The fear associated with a public health emergency can push people apart.

People who are normally close to family and friends may avoid contact because they are afraid they might get sick.

Public health officials will tell you how to protect yourself and your loved ones. Until then, stay connected by phone and through e-mail.

If you are anxious about a health risk, talk to someone who can help. This may be your doctor, a family member, friend, clergy member, teacher or mental health professional.

If you notice a big change in a loved one, friend or co-worker, reach out to him / her. Make some time to talk. Watching out for others shows you care. It can be comforting to both of you.

If you or someone you know is having a hard time managing his / her emotions, seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

## Get Reliable Information

When we face uncertainty about health risks, it is important to keep things in perspective.

Get information during public health emergencies from:

- Your healthcare provider
- Uncas Health District  
phone: 860-823-1189
- The CT Department of Public Health (DPH) website at  
<http://www.dph.state.ct.us/>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1-800-CDC-INFO (4636)  
for assistance in English and Spanish  
TTY 1-888-232-6348  
<http://www.cdc.gov/>

**This publication available online at**  
<http://www.uncashd.org/>

Produced with collaborative support  
from the **CT Disaster Behavioral  
Health Response Network  
of Eastern Connecticut**

Southeastern Mental Health Authority  
401 W. Thames St. Norwich, CT 06360  
24 Hour Crisis Line (860) 886-9302

Thanks to the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services,  
Disaster and Terrorism Branch

**For additional information about  
self care visit this web site:**  
[http://www.ctrp.org/resources\\_families.htm](http://www.ctrp.org/resources_families.htm)



## COPING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS DURING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES



 **UNCAS  
HEALTH DISTRICT**

**phone: 860-823-1189**

Serving the towns of

Bozrah, Franklin, Griswold, Lebanon, Lisbon,  
Montville, Norwich, Preston, Salem,  
Sprague, Voluntown