



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Dave A. Chokshi, MD
Commissioner

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New Data on COVID-19 and Mental Health in New York City

COVID-19 is taking an emotional toll: New Yorkers are experiencing anxiety, depression and stress

For Suicide Prevention Month, a new media campaign urges New Yorkers to call, chat or text with NYC Well for free and confidential mental health support

September 22, 2020 – The Health Department today released a new report on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health in New York City. Health Opinion Polls conducted in April and May found New Yorkers are experiencing stress, anxiety and depression, and parents report the emotional or behavioral health of children has been negatively affected by the pandemic. Meanwhile, mortality data found 261 suicide deaths in New York City in the first six months of 2020, compared to 270 over the same time period in 2019. These data remain provisional and are subject to change. Read the [full report](#) (PDF).

“People in this city have been through so much stress and trauma, and what they’re sharing reflects the difficulty of these recent months,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Dave A. Chokshi**. “There are resources available for New Yorkers feeling stress and anxiety, including the helpline, NYC Well. For anyone who needs support, we recommend you reach out, talk to someone and connect. We are here for you.”

To mark Suicide Prevention Month, the Health Department will launch a new media campaign on TV and social media urging New Yorkers to call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text “WELL” to 65173 or chat online and nyc.gov/nycwell. New Yorkers have reached out to NYC Well—the City’s free and confidential behavioral health support and referral service implemented in partnership with the Mayor’s Office of ThriveNYC—in higher numbers since mid-March 2020 compared to the 2019 average. Specifically, there was an increase in contacts to NYC Well related to anxiety in March and April of this year.

“The new data released today underscore the widespread grief, trauma, depression and anxiety faced by so many right now,” said **Susan Herman, Director of the Mayor’s Office of ThriveNYC**. “During Suicide Prevention Month, we ask New Yorkers to help us spread the word that New Yorkers can access free and confidential mental health support through NYC Well -- it’s always just a call, text, or chat away.”

“New Yorkers, and particularly communities of color, are facing unprecedented challenges that are understandably affecting their emotional and mental health,” said **Health Department Executive Deputy Commissioner Dr. Hillary Kunins**. “We continue to provide education and support to these communities, including through our COVID-19 Community Conversations.

These structured discussions focus on the impact of the pandemic including structural racism, mental health and trauma, participants learn coping and resiliency skills, and find out about available mental health resources.”

The Health Department's Health Opinion Poll was conducted April 16-23 and May 13-20 in English, Spanish, and Chinese. The surveys focused on adult New Yorkers’ knowledge, opinions, and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The final sample for each survey includes approximately 1,200 New Yorkers aged 18 and older.

According to the poll, health care workers; adults with children in the household; adults afraid of interpersonal violence due to actions or threats of a current or former partner; and adults who have a family member with a chronic health condition (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, HIV or cancer) are more likely to experience adverse mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 is having an impact on anxiety and depression among adult New Yorkers—44% reported symptoms of anxiety due to COVID-19, and 36% reported symptoms of depression in the previous two weeks. In addition, 35% of adults with children in their household report the emotional or behavioral health of at least one child has been negatively affected by the pandemic.

The reasons for adverse mental health also vary across race and ethnicity. Latino (49%) and Asian (45%) adults are more likely than white (34%) adults to report a job loss or reduced hours. Latino (53%) adults are more likely than white (40%) adults to report feelings of financial stress.

The City has taken action to support the immediate and long-term behavioral and mental health needs of New Yorkers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on supporting community members and providers working in communities most burdened:

- The Health Department released 24 guidance documents available in 26 languages on experiences of stress, anxiety, and grief; to promote resilience and emotional well-being; and to provide tips and tools to cope with mental health challenges and to manage substance use.
- To support health care workers and first responders on the front lines, NYC Health + Hospitals, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, developed the Resilience and Trauma Training Series known as Healing, Education, Resilience & Opportunity for New York’s Frontline Workers (HERO-NY). The Health Department has contributed to the development of the training curricula and Health Department staff served as panelists on training sessions. The Health Department also created resources to support behavioral health providers in adopting remote service delivery models; collaborated in the creation of a platform to support providers in increasing staffing; and increased one-on-one assistance from our program staff to support providers in adapting during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

- In addition to these efforts, the Health Department implemented a new community education program in the priority neighborhoods identified by the Mayor’s Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity. This program provides a virtual presentation that addresses the COVID-19’s impact on mental health; health disparities; and the effects of trauma, grief, and anxiety. The program provides effective coping skills and mental health resources available in New York City to those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Between July and August, the initiative partnered with community groups to engage more than 1,300 New Yorkers to get the mental health support they need. The goal is to reach 10,000 New Yorkers by the end of 2020.

Stress can affect the way you think, feel and act. Signs and symptoms of stress can include:

- Physical effects: fatigue, exhaustion, headaches, rapid heartbeat or, worsening of preexisting medical conditions.
- Emotional effects: feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, agitation or irritability.
- Mental effects: confusion, forgetfulness, or difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Behavioral effects: experiencing uncharacteristic behaviors such as becoming restless, argumentative or short-tempered, or changes in eating and sleeping patterns.

Know where to go for support & treatment

The COVID-19 pandemic can be stressful for you, your loved ones and your friends. It is natural to feel overwhelmed, sad, anxious and afraid, or to experience other symptoms of distress, such as difficulties with sleep.

The Health Department developed [guidance](#) on how to lower your stress and manage the situation:

- Focus on areas over which you have some control.
- Remind yourself of your strengths.
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones.
- Use healthy coping skills.
- Connect with community, including faith communities and faith leaders.
- Consider civic engagement, advocacy, and collective healing.

If your symptoms of stress become overwhelming, reach out for support and help. You can contact NYC Well, a confidential 24/7 helpline, staffed by trained counselors. They can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. Call [888-NYC-WELL](tel:888-NYC-WELL) (888-692-9355), Text “WELL” to 65173, or Chat at nyc.gov/nycwell.

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