



March 14, 2020

Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Director Lori Criss and agency leaders have been urgently engaged with the behavioral health community to support their needs with COVID-19. This new crisis puts stress on an already taxed system dealing with the opiate crisis, overdose deaths, suicides, and the mental health and addiction needs of Ohioans.

TELE-HEALTH

With Director Maureen Corcoran and the Department of Medicaid, they are filing emergency rules to expand and enhance telehealth options for Ohioans and their providers. These rules will relax regulations so that more people can be served safely in their homes rather than needing to travel to addiction and mental health treatment centers. This is the first regulatory change that we are rolling out to help reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19 for patients, their families, and our behavioral health workforce which is an important part of the emergent response and community support to COVID-19. Other strategies to support the critical behavioral health workforce to ensure access to care for Ohioans with mental illness and addiction are being worked on right now.

- These rules will allow the use of telephones for counseling for other services. This allows **complete geographic coverage of telehealth services throughout the state of Ohio, in every home, through just a simple landline. This is important because we know that** broadband and cellular service are not available in every part of Ohio, a challenge that the Lieutenant Governor is taking on.
- Behavioral health providers and their patients will use normal cell phones and applications like Facetime to deliver provider and patient counseling and other services. This eliminates the need for special equipment to connect through videoconferencing.
- The rules also eliminate the requirement that the first visit for behavioral health services be in-person. So if a person hasn't been connected to mental health or addiction services but needs them now during this emergency declaration, they will be able to get help without having to see a professional in person first.
- The emergency rules expand to allow telehealth for additional services not currently allowed and to additional provider-types who are not currently able to use telehealth as a way to connect with their patients.

OPIOID TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Last night, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration approved Ohio's COVID-19 and Opioid Treatment Program plan. The federal government has shared this guidance with the other states as a sample of what other states should be considering.

Opioid Treatment Programs are a critical component of Ohio's response to the opioid crisis, serving thousands of Ohioans with medication assisted treatment, psychological counseling, and other recovery supports. Their continued operation is essential to our state and its citizens. The approved emergency plan covers guidance on:

- how these critical providers should manage operations to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19 for patients and staff, and
- on helping make sure that patients can access medications if they are unable to leave their homes.

Our focus is on saving lives – from both COVID-19 and addiction.

- Naloxone Mail Order Program – Through a partnership with Harm Reduction Ohio, we will expand and amplify our efforts to make sure people are aware of mail-order program. 850 kits have been supplied to the group this week and kits can be requested online.
<https://www.harmreductionohio.org/get-naloxone/>

MANAGING COVID19-RELATED STRESS

OhioMHAS has developed and pushed out tips, [videos](#), fact sheets, and social media messaging related to COVID-19 related stress. Communication office is working with JIC to provide behavioral messaging including calming messages and tools to address stress, children emotional concerns, special populations including COVID-19 information in Spanish provided in coordination with Ohio Hispanic and Latino Commission.

Here's the message:

The coronavirus has many people feeling distressed. This is very normal in times of crisis. You can manage these feelings by taking some simple steps. Here are some things you can do to feel better:

1. **Get information from a trusted resource:** coronavirus.ohio.gov. This website is updated regularly by the Ohio Department of Health in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It has the facts on what is happening in Ohio and helpful resources on prevention and testing for you and your family.

If you have specific questions, **ask an expert at 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634)**. This call center is managed by the Ohio Department of Health and is now open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

2. **Limit media exposure.** Today's 24-hour news cycle can make it difficult to turn away from the TV, radio, or social media, but research has shown that excess media exposure

to coverage of stressful events can result in negative mental health outcomes. Use trusted media outlets to gather the information you need, then turn them off.

3. **Reduce your stress and feel better:** A. Be prepared. Prevent risk of illness by taking simple steps that are good practices: Wash your hands. Cover your cough. Increase cleaning. Stay home if you're sick. Here's an illness prevention fact sheet from the Ohio Department of Health to help you and your family. B. Eat healthy foods and exercise to boost your immune system C. Get plenty of rest. D. Stay in touch with friends and loved ones and talk with them about your worries e. Keep participating in hobbies and activities that you enjoy to improve your mood.
4. **Recognize signs of distress in yourself and family or friends.** Signs of stress include worry, fear, sleeping or eating too little or too much, difficulty concentrating, pulling away from people or things at home or work or in daily life, yelling or fighting with family or friends, having thoughts or memories you can't get out of your head, unexplained aches and pains, feeling hopeless or helpless, thinking of hurting yourself or someone else, and smoking or drinking alcohol more than you should.
5. **Get help for your stress if you need it** by calling the national Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990. Or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746.

OTHER ACTIONS TAKEN BY MHAS:

- **Increased supply of medications** including those for addiction and mental health through Ohio Pharmacy Services to ensure continued access for state facilities and community partners.
- **Gave guidance to boards on purchasing options through the state** to centralize access to and streamline the supply chain for products needed to reduce transmission of COVID-19.
- The Department is **conference calling several times each week with ADAMHS Boards and Community provider agency leaders to discuss impacts of COVID-19**, the state response to date, and to get input and share information on ways to coordinate local and state needs and strategies resultant to COVID-19. Working per guidance of ODH, CDC, Legal, County Health Departments and health care and supporting state partners on agency protocols on self-monitoring, reporting, and quarantine.
- **Continuing to monitor and investigate complaints and patient rights and grievances to ensure safety** in facilities regulated by OhioMHAS.
- **Cancelled all conferences, workshops, trainings** to minimize exposure.
- **Developed agency COVID-19 preparedness planning guide** that is being edited for final version. Communication office is working with JIC to provide behavioral messaging including calming messages and tools to address stress, children emotional concerns, special

populations including COVID-19 information in Spanish provided in coordination with Ohio Hispanic and Latino Commission.

SUPPORTING ADULT CARE FACILITIES AND HOUSING AND HOMELESS PARTNERS:

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is hosting a weekly conference call with the Adult Care Facility Association, NAMI and housing providers to coordinate housing specific prevention and response information and resources. In collaboration with state and local health departments, housing operators can provide critical information and prepare to take additional steps to prevent the spread of the virus, should the need arise. The department developed communication intended to provide specific information for all housing environments supported by OhioMHAS. The communication was emailed directly to the Adult Care Facility operators and posted to the department's coronavirus webpage. The documents include:

- The OhioMHAS Housing Tips Guidance document provides specific information for all housing environments supported by the department.
- The HUD Exchange Disease Risks and Homelessness link provides planning guidance by homeless service providers including overnight emergency shelters, day shelters and meal service providers
- The CDC Interim Guidance for Homeless Shelters link provides guidance to larger facilities (transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency shelters, SUD treatment centers, etc.), in preparation for, and in the event of, an occurrence of Coronavirus.
- The CDC Getting Your Home Ready link provides guidance to recovery housing operators and residential care facility operators; smaller homes both in preparation for, and in the event of, an outbreak.

Providing Coronavirus specific behavioral health information

- Created a webpage pointing to ODH, CDC and behavioral health specific resources for COVID19. For information and resources for maintaining behavioral health during this uncertain time and to stay up to date on OhioMHAS actions related to the virus, citizens can visit: <https://mha.ohio.gov/Health-Professionals/About-Mental-Health-and-Addiction-Treatment/Emergency-Preparedness/Coronavirus#42351146-cdc-resources>, or visit the OhioMHAS home page at: mha.ohio.gov and click on *Managing Coronavirus-related stress* at the top of the page.
- In addition, the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak may be stressful for both adults and children. The [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov) has [ways to manage your mental health](#) on its website. There is also information for parents, responders, and people who have been released from quarantine. The Ohio Department of Health continues to be the main source of information for status updates and questions about COVID-19.

Supporting access for community behavioral health services

- OhioMHAS has developed guidance documents to assist providers with supporting continuation of community-based behavioral health services using telehealth technology. This includes guidance to Opiate Treatment Providers to ensure people who need it can continue to access to critical medication assisted treatment.

Ensuring safe hospitals

- The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) values our patients' visitors, and the role they play in recovery and wellness of their loved one. In response to the Governor's most recent recommendations, OhioMHAS is limiting access to our facilities across Ohio the state's six regional psychiatric hospitals by prohibiting outside visitation. At this time, telephonic visitation can occur as we finalize technology to assist with further visitation options. Outside contractors and vendors that are mission critical will be granted access to the hospital after they have been screened.
- The health and safety of our patients and staff is our top priority. We are committed
- to efforts to prevent the spread of the virus while ensuring continuity of care for those who OhioMHAS serves.
- These safety measures have been put in place as a means of protection and are not meant to isolate or limit communication with patients. Rest assured OhioMHAS staff will work diligently to incorporate the use of technology to maintain and facilitate communication between patients and their families and guardians.
- In addition, we have increased the cleaning schedules at the hospitals, and staff are encouraging all people who enter the hospital to wash their hands frequently with soap and water, and to use the hand sanitizer provided in the reception areas. These safety measures will be reassessed daily.