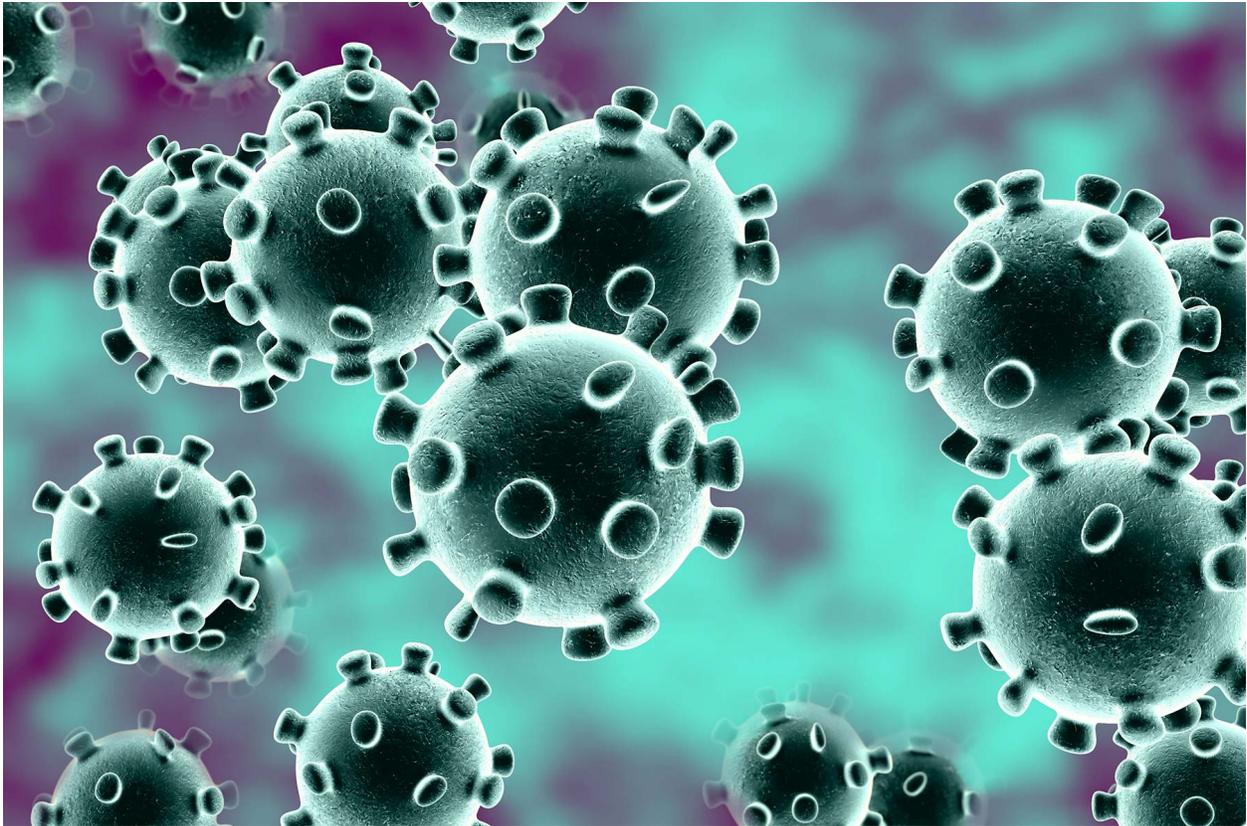


# What to do if you're anxious or worried about coronavirus (COVID-19)

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**Life is uncertain. We all know it and it can make people anxious. But there are times when world events bring forward even greater uncertainty in daily life, which in turn can make us even more anxious than usual. The coronavirus outbreak is one of these times for many people. How can you manage this anxiety and worry during these uncertain times? Here are a few suggestions.**

## Be self-compassionate

Even people who don't usually struggle with anxiety are experiencing more worry and anxiety now.

So: don't be too hard on yourself if you're experiencing more anxiety than usual.

If you've been practicing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) you're probably already experienced at tolerating uncertainty. Give yourself credit for doing the best you can to cope in a difficult situation.

## Limit the news & unplug from social media

Understandably coronavirus is the lead story for most news outlets. People on social media are likewise sharing information and stories, some of which are accurate but others may have little to do with reality. The general public is interested and wants to know the latest details. Yet when our attention is drawn to something, we are more likely to focus on it and continue thinking about it. As we think about and focus more on coronavirus, the PERCEPTION of threat increases (not the actual risk but our perception of it). By limiting or eliminating contact with media you can help yourself manage your own anxiety and worry. If you cannot eliminate contact with media, control it: Make sure that your information only comes from reputable sources, such as:

- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)

If you do watch or read the news, try to limit how often you do:

- Commit to only checking in a couple of times a day.
- Set a regular time when you check the news everyday. Standardizing the times you check will help to both think less about it and to reduce fighting with yourself to check.
- Disable news alerts on your phone so that you get updates when you want them.
- It can also be helpful to rely on family and friends to provide major updates thereby making it unnecessary to check the media.



## Stop talking about coronavirus

Water cooler chat with coworkers and sharing the latest details with family and friends will be common. But: it keeps us thinking about it, which will influence our sense of threat/risk.

To counteract this, don't initiate the conversation and change the subject if it does come up. If you're comfortable doing so, ask friends and family to not discuss the coronavirus news updates with you.

Not only will this help you feel less anxious, it'll help others too.

## Protecting yourself

**Good hand hygiene** – although COVID-19 is a novel virus, it's still a virus and handwashing remains one of the best ways to protect yourself. Follow the guidelines of your local public health agency, [Health Canada](#), or the [World Health Organization](#).

Washing your hands for 20 seconds with warm water is sufficient protection. Don't set a timer as it will establish a false sense of security and certainty. Remember we live in an uncertain world and we need to be able to tolerate some uncertainty.

**Stop touching your face** – viruses enter our bodies through our eyes, nose and mouth. The coronavirus can also be inhaled if you are standing close to someone who coughs or sneezes without covering their nose or mouth. Similarly, excessive handwashing can lead to dry, chapped and cracked skin which ironically provides another point of entry for the virus. Use moisturizer after you wash to help combat dry skin. Many people touch their faces out of habit. Habits can be changed if you commit to it.

**Social distancing** – during the period when coronavirus is active it may be reasonable to disengage the usual greeting of handshaking, hugging and kissing and keeping a distance of 1 metre (3 feet) from someone who's exhibiting symptoms. It's important to follow the recommendations of your local health authority (and not what anxiety or worry is telling you to do). If the number of cases changes in your area the local health authority will have the most up to date recommendations to follow.



And importantly, to prevent the spread of infection, if you are feeling unwell and have a fever or a cough, please stay home and limit interactions with people in your home.

## **Coronavirus and travel**

The coronavirus situation is rapidly evolving. Check with the national authorities for updated travel advisories (e.g., [WHO](#), [Government of Canada travel advice](#)). Some travel insurance providers have already stopped providing reimbursement for cancellation due to coronavirus, and it's likely that other insurance carriers will do the same. If you have to, or are choosing to fly, and you elect to take travel insurance, take the time to read the fine print and ask questions if in doubt.

*Thanks to Scientific Advisory Committee members [Maureen Whittal](#), [Lynn Miller](#), and [Melisa Robichaud](#) for creating this resource.*