



Differential Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health

This infographic is intended to help mental health providers 1) understand the differential impact of COVID-19 on mental health, 2) identify high-risk subgroups, and 3) present suggestions for targeted efforts.

COVID-19 Infections Across the US

Across the United States, COVID-19 has not impacted states, or individuals, in an uniform way. This differential impact has varied from state to state, county to county, neighborhood to neighborhood.

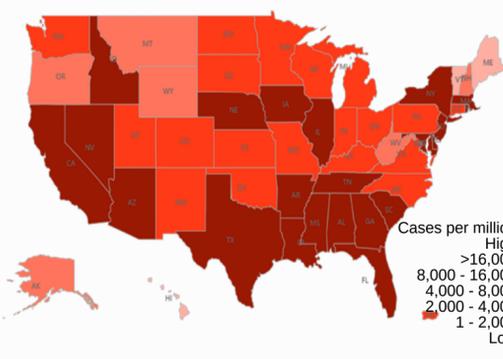


FIGURE 1. As of September 1, 2020, infection rates varied across the US with the Southeast recording high infection rates.¹

Key Points

- Different subgroups have been differentially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Disasters are often accompanied by increased psychological distress; however, the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced opportunities for support and access to care.
- Tailored interventions are needed that vary across high risk subgroups and that recognize individuals may belong to multiple subgroups at once.

COVID-19 Infections Across the Southeast

The Southeast region has been hit particularly hard in terms of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths for many of the same reasons it has faced other challenges:

- High proportion of racial/ethnic minorities and health disparities
- Less aggressive state policies to control spread
- Relatively weak health and public health infrastructure

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Disasters and Mental Health

Research suggests disasters are accompanied by increases in psychological distress including depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorders. The increased stress resulting from a disaster is justifiable; however, majority of those impacted do not develop clinical disorders.

Disasters typically impact some populations more than others. Risk factors, prominently seen in the Southeast region, include:

- Low socio-economic status
- Racial/ethnic groups
- Lack of social support
- Direct exposure to the event

Percentage of adults reporting adverse mental health outcome

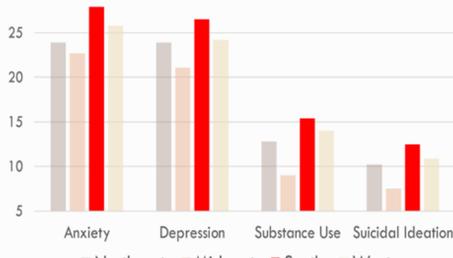


FIGURE 2. Southeastern states are seeing increased rates of psychological distress.²

Challenges Unique to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is different from other disasters:

- Widespread in the US and globally rather than limited to one specific location making it difficult for others to assist the affected areas.
- Requires a need for physical distancing and reduces the opportunities for social support. Disruptions in accessing physical and mental health care and services.
- Accompanied by an economic impact which creates a host of secondary problems (i.e., unemployment, loss of insurance, financial stress).

These additional challenges make it difficult to access care at a time it may be needed most.

Percentage of those accessing professional help when needed

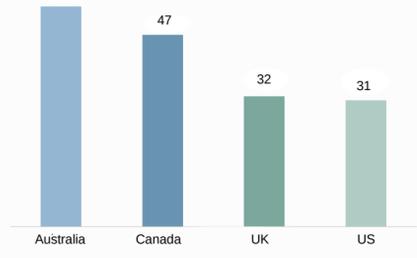


FIGURE 3. US adults are less likely to get needed mental health care during COVID-19 compared to those in other countries.³

High Risk Subgroups



Populations with COVID infections:

Acute COVID-19 can lead to psychiatric symptoms, perhaps as a result of direct neurological effects, the inflammatory response to the infection, or the psychological trauma associated with severe illness (i.e., hospitalization, ICU admission).



Front line providers:

Healthcare workers, mental health providers, and public health practitioners may experience anxiety, depression, insomnia, and burnout related to worry of exposure to self and family; exhaustion from caring for sick patients; hectic work schedules coupled with managing home-life.



Racial/Ethnic minorities:

African Americans and Hispanics have disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 due to socio-economic factors, chronic medical conditions, limited access to care, and employment in jobs associated with high exposure rates (i.e., essential workers)



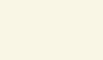
Unemployed:

May experience increased mental distress, substance use, and suicide resulting from financial stress, loss of insurance and reduced access to services and care.



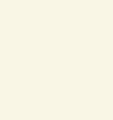
Serious Mental Illness:

May experience disruptions in employment; lack of private insurance; treated in public mental health safety net setting; and may reside in institutionalized settings at elevated risk of COVID outbreaks, including state hospitals, homeless shelters, and nursing homes.



Pre-existing Mental Health Disorders:

These individuals may be at increased risk for experiencing symptoms or relapse.



Socially isolated:

Quarantine can lead to anxiety, confusion, and anger. The elderly and those living alone prior to the pandemic may be at particular risk.

Addressing Psychological Distress

1

Mental health providers and public health practitioners continue their efforts to address the consequences of the pandemic.

- Conduct ongoing mental health surveillance.
- Provide care and services for those who develop a disorder requiring medication or psychotherapy.

2

Develop targeted efforts to provide support support and a sense of community.

- Address underlying social factors.
- Recognize high-risk subgroups are under different type of stress with many individuals belonging to multiple subgroups at once.

3

Amend organizational priorities.

- Create greater awareness of public mental health issues among the general public.
- Strengthen relationships between public health and mental health agencies.
- Support cross-knowledge and training for staff.
- Increase access to higher quality data about communities and individuals served.

4

Re-evaluate old ways of thinking.

- Retool mental health systems and best practices to avoid a one size fits all approach.
- Support resilience building for individuals, communities, and providers.

REFERENCES

1. <https://coronavirus.1point3acres.com/en>
2. Czeisler MÉ et al. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1049–1057.
3. Reginald D. Williams II et al. *Do Americans Face Greater Mental Health and Economic Consequences from COVID-19? Comparing the US With Other High-Income Countries* (The Commonwealth Fund, August 2020.)
4. Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center. (2020, September 1). The COVID-19 Patchwork Pandemic and Mental Health. <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/product/covid-19-patchwork-pandemic-and-mental-health>

