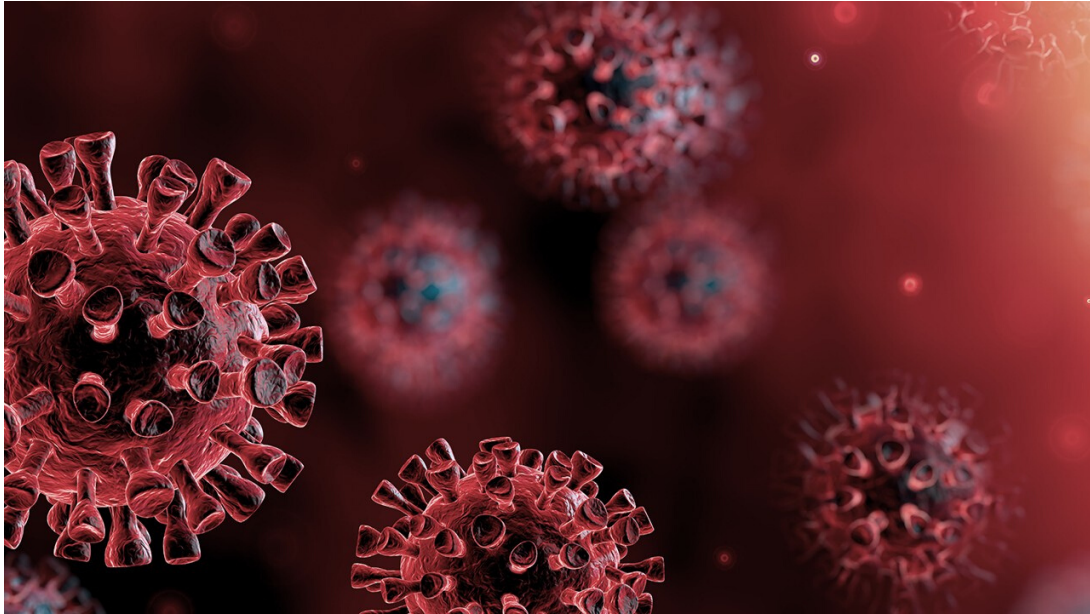


# TRAUMA INFORMED NEWSLETTER

March 2020



## COVID-19: IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The world is currently experiencing a crisis that has not been seen in many people's lifetimes. The Covid-19, coronavirus pandemic has impacted almost every facet of life and has led to many dramatic, but necessary changes. Individuals and families are being asked to make significant adjustments to their day to day life while coping with the heightened stress and anxiety. The pandemic is impacting the entire community. However, it is important to consider those most vulnerable and ways to best serve clients during and after this crisis.

### WHO IS MOST VULNERABLE?

**It is most likely that COVID-19 will disproportionately impact low-income families.**

- Most low-income jobs cannot be done remotely, and many do not offer paid sick days. Parents and caregivers may be out of work, or they may be at high risk of contracting the virus if they are working in a field that is deemed essential (grocery stores, gas stations, food delivery, etc.).
- Low-income families are disproportionately uninsured or underinsured for medical care.
- Low-income people may lack the financial resources to prepare and protect against COVID-19, including stocking up on food in their pantry or buying soap, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies in bulk.
- Low-income children rely on free and reduced school breakfasts and lunches for their daily nutrition. Families also depend on school for childcare. Parents may not be able to stay home with their children and supplement the online curriculum.
- Low-income families are more likely to live in smaller quarters, share bathrooms and kitchens with multiple people, and can't quarantine effectively. This can become especially problematic if a member of the family is exposed to the virus.

# CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS MAY BE MORE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE

- Missouri is already seeing a significant decrease in the number of reports of abuse and neglect. Advocates in the field attribute this to children and youth not seeing the adults who are typically the first to identify signs of abuse and neglect (teachers, childcare providers, nurses, counselors, etc.). The responsibility of reporting will now fall on family and any community members who continue to stay in contact with the family. It is essential to consider the changing landscape of reporting during this crisis.
- The long-term impacts on childhood trauma due to this pandemic are unknown. Still, it can be inferred that children and youth in the community are now at higher risk for abuse and neglect within the home as well as at risk for grief and high levels of community stress. Based on this inference, providers can be intentional in assessing these risks when communicating with clients over the phone or video. It is also essential to prepare for the emergence of more instances of trauma and the higher numbers of clients with PTSD symptoms as providers adjust back to in-person services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILIES

Be aware of behavior changes. As children and adolescents adjust to homeschooling, being separated from their social support networks, and being faced with new day to day stressors, mental health symptoms may be worsened or triggered. The following are common changes to look for:

- Excessive crying or irritation
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (ex: bedwetting)
- Excessive worry/sadness
- Unhealthy eating/sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out”
- Difficulty with attention or concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain

It is crucial to speak with parents about the importance of discussing the COVID-19 outbreak with their children and to give them helpful strategies. A few recommendations are as follows:

- Avoid graphic details or unnecessary details about tragic circumstances
- Ask your child what they have heard and if they have questions about it
- Ask your child how they feel about what they've heard

## RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

- Develop a plan for all family members to maintain regular contact with family and friends using telephone, texting, video chat, or social media.
- Schedule time for family activities such as watching movies, going for walks, reading, listening to music, playing games, etc.
- Maintain a schedule for meals and schoolwork. A predictable, structured household will provide a sense of stability for children in a time of high uncertainty.

### **A note from all of us at the Trauma Response Program:**

We understand this is a time of high stress, and we thank all of you for your continued dedication to your clients and the St. Louis community. We wish you and your families well and hope for your health and safety during this time.

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