

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

State of Mississippi

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DMH Programs Take Precautions Regarding COVID-19

March 20, 2020 (Jackson, MS) – Mississippi Department of Mental Health programs began limiting visitation last week as the first signs of COVID-19 began appearing in the state and will continue to do so in order to protect the health of the people served through our hospitals, nursing homes, regional facilities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and community programs.

To maintain the health and safety of all Mississippians, the DMH Central Office in Jackson is closed to the general public until further notice. Our employees will continue to support our mission by responding to e-mails and phone calls and providing guidance and support for the public. It is important to note that the DMH Helpline will remain staffed at all times. Mississippians can call 1-877-210-8513 for information about services or supports near them, and additional resources can be located online at www.mentalhealthms.com and www.standupms.org.

DMH's state-operated programs are in constant communication with Central Office, and all state-run programs have conducted infection control training and disseminated COVID-19 information, along with instructions for universal precautions, to all staff. All programs have also reviewed continuity of operations plans, conducted inventories of essential supplies, and are monitoring supplies closely. As mentioned, they have also limited visitation, though exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis as approved by administration.

Additionally, all state-run programs are monitoring staff as they come and go from the facilities. Employees are being screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, including temperature checks.

General guidelines from the Mississippi State Department of Health and the CDC regarding the prevention COVID-19 have been disseminated to all DMH Certified Programs. Those guidelines include:

- Employees who are sick should stay home, and anyone experiencing signs of respiratory illness should notify their supervisors and stay home.
- Employees reporting to work after out-of-state travel should be screened by asking if they have any exposure to infected individuals and asked if they have any signs of respiratory illness, and an emphasis is placed on screening for fever. If possible, employees should have their temperature taken before being allowed in the workplace.

- Employees reporting to work should follow general guidelines that include
 - Washing hands frequently and thoroughly
 - Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects
 - Refraining from unnecessary movement or congregating outside the immediate work area
 - Communicate via email and conference calls as often as possible

The ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus is a challenging time for many, but DMH encourages Mississippians to learn about how they can cope with the stress and anxiety that is a natural response to these difficulties.

Stress and Coping

To support yourself, make sure not to watch too much news or social media. It can be distressing to hear so much bad news, so take breaks from it. Make sure you are also taking time to do things you enjoy, whether that's playing games, reading books, or enjoying a nice cup of coffee.

People who have pre-existing mental health conditions should make sure to continue their treatment, whether that is medication or therapy, and also pay attention to worsening symptoms and share them with their service providers.

As always, take care of your physical health by getting exercise, eating healthy meals, avoiding excessive drinking, and trying to get plenty of sleep. Everyone should seek help when it is needed.

Social Distancing and Isolation

While many businesses and people are practicing social distancing, remember that does not mean one has to stay isolated at the same time. Taking proactive steps to reach out to friends and family members can help reduce the anxiety or loneliness someone may feel during this time.

People are encouraged to get “face-to-face” contact through video chat applications like FaceTime or Skype. If someone isn't able to do a video chat, then call them and hear their voice and let them hear yours. Practicing deep breathing, meditation, yoga, and getting exercise can help maintain a positive mindset.

Help is Available

The DMH Helpline will remain staffed at all times. Call 1-877-210-8513 for information about services or supports near you. Additional resources for Mississippians are located www.mentalhealthms.com and www.standupms.org.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration also has a Disaster Distress Hotline at 1-800-985-5990, and you may also text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

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DMH is supporting a better tomorrow by making a difference in the lives of Mississippians with mental illness, substance use disorders and intellectual or developmental disabilities one person at a time