

COPING WITH THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ROADMAP TO RECOVERY PHASE CHANGES

Washington has been moving through reopening phases during recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, following the governor's [Roadmap to Recovery](#) plan. Everyone has been doing their part to help by following public health recommendations. This effort has paid off with a gradual loosening of restrictions, the return to many activities, reopening of businesses, and students' return to in-person school. The state's quick vaccine distribution also offers hope. Now, variants of the virus have created new challenges.

The shutdown for much of the last year meant limited activities, closed businesses and schools, and social isolation. This has been very difficult for many of us, impacting each of us differently. And the pandemic hasn't affected all communities equally. People of color and essential workers may be experiencing greater behavioral health impacts.

Moving into spring, we have been hopeful for a return to normal. But it is possible that parts of Washington may shift back and forth through reopening phases as we work together to control this pandemic. Those shifts can feel frustrating or confusing. People may have strong behavioral health responses to the idea of going backward, **even if it is only temporary**. Understanding how to recognize and manage behavioral health impacts of shifting phases can help you stay as healthy as possible.



APRIL 2021

Common behavioral health reactions to phase rollbacks and uncertainty

During this time, we may experience changes in the way we feel, act, and think. These are **normal** responses to unexpected or unwelcome changes in our lives.

Emotional reactions:

- Feeling angry and disappointed about facing another round of restrictions
- Feeling anxious or fearful about a potential increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths
- Feeling sad or hopeless about facing another potential wave of cases after being in the pandemic for over a year

Behavioral reactions:

- Increase in risk-taking or risky behaviors
- Increased substance use
- Increased withdrawal from friends and activities, even when restrictions are relaxed

Physical reactions:

- Having trouble with sleep or sleep disruption
- Eating or snacking much more or less than usual

Cognitive reactions:

- Becoming more easily distracted or confused
- Having difficulty concentrating and completing many everyday tasks

Preparing for phase rollback

One way to prepare for potential changes is to think about the challenges that may be hardest for you. In this way, you help yourself get ready for what may come.



Consider what your usual markers for stress are. Do you tend to get headaches? Become more irritable? Have trouble sleeping? If you know what signs of stress are typical for you, it will be easier to recognize when they happen.



Think about the ways you coped during this last year of the pandemic. What worked for you and what might you need to add to your coping plan?



Do you need to add more tools to your coping toolbox? Visit coronavirus.wa.gov/wellbeing for behavioral health resources that can help you cope.



Tips for managing potential behavioral health impacts

- Maintain a regular schedule of eating, sleeping, and other routine activities if possible.
- Draw from the cultural traditions, spiritual practices, and stress management tools you have found helpful in the past.
- Get community support. Reach out to friends and family members to stay connected, share information, and support each other.
- Reduce exposure to media and social media, particularly if you notice decreased mood, increased irritability, or difficulty with sleep or concentration. Choose one or two trusted sources of information, such as the [Washington State Coronavirus Response webpage](#), the [Washington State Department of Health](#), the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), or your primary care provider.
- [Talk with children](#) about current events at a level they can understand. Explain what is happening and reassure them that you will keep them safe. [Mindfulness practices](#) can also be helpful for children and adults.
- It is **okay** to reach out for help.
 - If you are feeling stressed and looking for help managing changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, [Washington Listens](#) is ready to help. Access this **free** and anonymous service by calling 1-833-681-0211.
 - Pay attention to signs that you are experiencing increased anxiety or depression. Reach out to your healthcare provider for help if you are worried these feelings are impacting your behavior or choices.
 - If you or someone you know is having a crisis, call 866-4-CRISIS (274747).



Resources

WA State Department of Health COVID-19 information

doh.wa.gov/coronavirus

Mental and emotional well-being

coronavirus.wa.gov/wellbeing

Questions about COVID-19?

Call our hotline at 1-800-525-0127. For interpretative services, press # when they answer and say your language.

Washington Listens

If you need someone to talk to about stress due to COVID-19, call 1-833-681-0211. TTY and interpretive services are available.

Crisis Connections

If you or someone you know is in emotional crisis, call the 24-hour crisis line at 866-4-CRISIS (274747) to get connected to the appropriate services. TTY and interpretive services are available.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

If you or someone you know is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, call 800-273-8255 or text HEAL to 741741 to reach a trained crisis counselor.

COVID-19 Behavioral Health Group

Behavioral Health Strike Team

Washington State Department of Health

Web: doh.wa.gov/covid19/behavioralhealth

Publication 821-138

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.