

Ebola information for people with family and friends in West Africa

It is understandable to feel anxiety and concern about the Ebola virus disease. It may be difficult to watch as the Ebola outbreak impacts your loved ones, and you may at times feel helpless as events unfold far away.

There are simple and effective ways to manage your and your family's fears and anxieties. Many of them are essential ingredients for a healthy lifestyle. Adopting them can help improve your overall emotional and physical well-being.

What you can do

Keep things in perspective. Try to lessen your worry by reducing the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage. Although you will want to keep informed — especially if you have loved ones in affected countries — remember to take a break from watching the news and focus on the things that are positive in your life and the things you have control over.

Get the facts. Find a source of information that is reliable and that you can trust such as a doctor, or public health resource. In Manitoba you can find Ebola information, including an Ebola fact sheet, at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/ebola.html> or you can call Health Links - Info Santé anytime at 204-788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257. The Public Health Agency of Canada also provides reliable health-related information, including information on Ebola, at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>.

Stay healthy. A healthy body can have a positive impact on your thoughts and emotions. Keys to a healthy lifestyle include washing hands regularly, eating a healthy diet, exercising, and avoiding drugs and alcohol.

Keep connected. It is important to keep socially connected and keep doing your normal activities. Social connections often provide opportunities to share feelings and relieve stress. This may also be an ideal time to become more involved with your community by receiving and sharing Ebola information obtained from reliable sources.

Draw on personal methods of comfort. Use your spiritual or personal beliefs to comfort yourself and reassure those around you. Try to keep a positive attitude and remember the challenges you've successfully coped with in the past.

Seek additional help if needed. If you, a friend, or family member are feeling overwhelming anxiety or are experiencing other extreme emotional reactions that are affecting daily life, there are professionals that can help. You can contact the following:

1. Klinik Community Health Centre 24-hour Crisis Line at 204-786-8686 in Winnipeg or toll-free elsewhere at 1-888-322-3019.
2. Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Line toll-free at 1-866-367-3276 (1-866-FOR-FARM).
3. Health Links – Info Santé can help you find appropriate resources through your local regional health authority at 204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257.

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Helping children cope

Children and youth can be affected by what they see and hear in the media, and they are influenced by the people who are important in their lives (parents, teachers, elders, other adults) as well as their friends. It is important to do the following:

- Answer their questions and concerns about Ebola simply and directly in a way that will reassure them.
- Remind them that while many people are talking about Ebola, it is very rare, especially in North America.
- Encourage them to speak with you if they have concerns or if people at school or in the community are saying things that make them feel bad.
- Take the opportunity to explain to them that when people say bad things to people because of their race or country of origin, that is called “stigma”. Stigma mostly occurs because of fear.
- Remind them that a person is not more at risk from Ebola because of their race or country of origin.