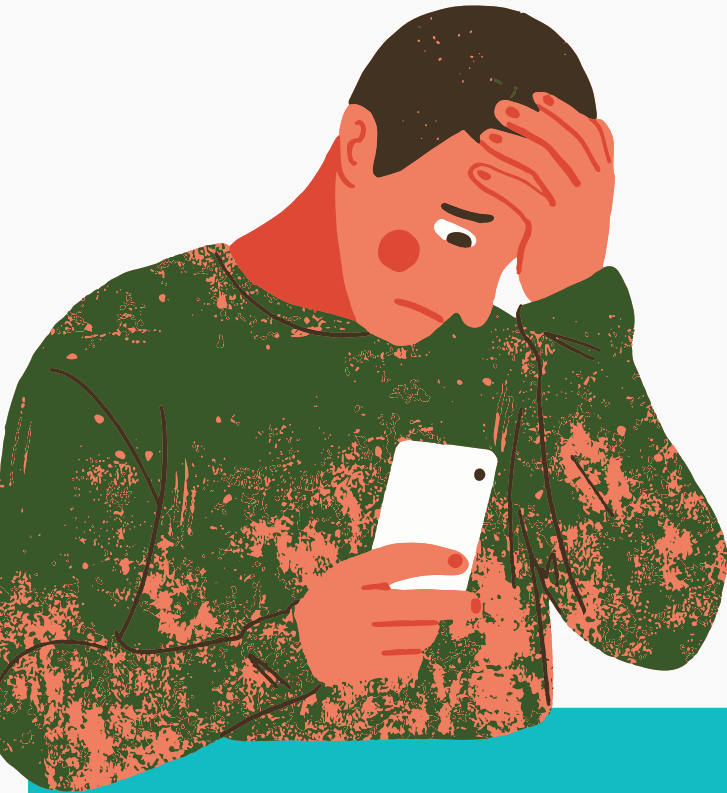




Managing mental health once testing positive

March 2022

Introduction



This guide is to help support those who have received a positive test result for COVID-19. It provides details on how to manage the emotional and mental health response that you may experience. **It does not include medical advice for any of the physical symptoms of COVID-19.** Please refer to current government guidance for up to date, practical steps that you must take to manage any COVID-19 symptoms.

Your emotional response

On getting a positive test result for COVID, you may experience a range of emotions. Different emotions arise for different people; your emotions are normal and valid. Take a moment and check in with yourself to notice how you are feeling.

Anxiety is one of the most common responses to a positive result. When we feel anxious, our initial urge is to act quickly. To counter this, take a few deep breaths, push your feet into the ground, and slow things down.

See if you can identify the emotions that are showing up for you. Once you have identified the feeling, there may be steps you can take to better manage it:



Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety are common and understandable responses to testing positive. These feelings commonly give rise to physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, dizziness, sweating, stomach issues and many more. You may also find that your head is filled with worries about what is going to happen.

See if you can isolate specifically what you are worrying about. Often, identifying what the worry/worries are can help you find solutions or more effective ways of handling them.

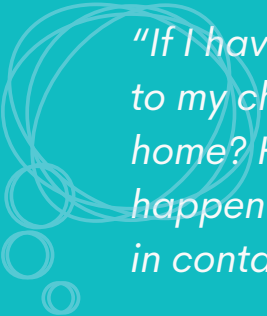
Common worries that people have about testing positive for COVID:

- Worry about becoming unwell/seriously unwell
- Worry about infecting others around them (loved ones - particularly vulnerable elderly relatives or young children)
- Worry about seeking treatment when health services are overburdened
- Worry about isolation arrangements and separation from family

Managing worries

Try to pinpoint exactly what your worries are, and use problem-solving skills to help you to plan for the possibilities. Sometimes, we can be overwhelmed by the “what ifs” in our minds, preventing us from identifying what it is we are really worried about or moving forward with useful action. It may help you to:

- Write down what some of your worries are
- Run these worries all the way through to the thing you are most concerned about, for example:



“If I have to go to hospital, I am worried about what will happen to my children. Who will they go to? Will they be able to stay at home? How will they continue their online schooling? What will happen to my dog? What will happen to the people I have been in contact with?”

Once you have identified the worries, it may be the case that there are practical steps you can take to plan for them. This may help you to feel as though you have taken whatever action you can take. Remember that worry is an understandable response to any situation where we feel out of control. As much as possible, try to allow the worries to exist without trying to control them. You may find it useful to use a mindfulness exercise to help you to do this, for example, **“leaves on a stream”**.

Managing the physical symptoms of anxiety or panic

If you feel overwhelmed by the current situation, and experience physical symptoms (e.g. dizziness, increase heart beat, hyperventilation, palm sweat, etc.), here are some practical steps you could take to manage the overwhelming sensation:

- **Take a few deep breaths.** Breathing calms us down by increasing levels of oxygen in our body, and sends signal to our brain to soothe our physical sensations.
 - Gently breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, keeping the pace slow and regular (counting to 3 when inhaling and exhaling helps to slow down your breathing). Slowly tense then relax all the muscles in your body, starting at your toes and working up to your head. Notice how your body and mind feel and slowly return to your calm state.
- **Try to use some grounding techniques to bring yourself back to the present.** These will not remove the worry, but they can help you to feel a little more centred and better able to function.
 - Use your senses to bring yourself back to the present: count five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can taste and one thing you can smell.
- There are other relaxation techniques to help calm the physical symptoms of anxiety. You can find helpful audio exercises of methods, such as progressive muscle relaxation; these can help to bring levels of arousal down and help you to feel more calm.



Frustration/guilt

You may feel frustrated about catching the virus, given your effort to avoid it, or because of the potential consequences for you and the people around you. You may feel as though you should have tried harder to avoid the virus, and you may even feel guilty for contracting it, given the risk this could pose to vulnerable people in your life.

You may also feel frustrated or impatient about other peoples' responses to you testing positive; for example, difficulties in getting advice, due to health services being overwhelmed.



If you are feeling guilty about testing positive:

Remind yourself that you are not at fault for catching the virus. This is one of the many things that cannot remain completely in our control, and criticising yourself for contracting a virus is likely to make you feel even worse.

If you are feeling frustrated:

Try to accept your frustration as an understandable emotion to be feeling right now. Try to allow some room for feelings like this, whilst seeking out actions that help you to feel more calm. Some ideas include: listening to relaxing music, talking to an understanding friend or family member, or losing yourself in a book or TV show.



Helpless or overwhelmed

In the current environment, testing positive can have a number of implications for you and the people around you. It may be quite overwhelming to discover that you have tested positive, especially before you know what the next steps are.

If you are feeling helpless or overwhelmed:

Remind yourself that this is a temporary state. Soon enough, you will have a better idea of what testing positive means for you, given your individual circumstances. Try to watch out for your mind projecting into the future, particularly if you notice yourself catastrophising and thinking of the worst case scenario. You may find the following tips helpful:

- Use any methods you have available to soothe yourself. Examples include:
 - Taking a hot shower or bath
 - Listen to calming music
 - Use an app to go through a guided meditation
 - Talk to a friend or family member who is able to reassure you
- As above, use grounding methods to try to keep you present in the face of the strong feelings. Techniques like **“dropping anchor”** may be helpful. This will not make the feelings go away, but it may help you to “weather the storm” until the strong feelings pass (and remember, the feelings will pass).



If you are experiencing any other emotional reaction

Acknowledge that you are in a very stressful situation, and it is natural to be experiencing any of the above emotions, or any others that you may be feeling. Be kind to yourself and do not beat yourself up for finding the experience difficult; it is difficult, and we do much better when we allow ourselves to acknowledge our painful feelings instead of telling ourselves we shouldn't feel them.

Taking care of your physical and mental health after testing positive

The days that follow a positive test will be experienced differently by everyone - depending on their symptoms, whether or not they are at home or in an isolation facility/hospital, and their own personal circumstances.

Try to ensure that you are doing as many of the things that keep you well as possible. This may be limited, depending on your circumstances after testing positive. If it is possible, try to continue:

- **Eating healthy food**, including plenty of fruits and vegetables
- **Staying connected with friends and family members**, seeking out emotional support (virtually) during this stressful time
- **Maintain as much of your regular routine as you can.** This may include simple things like getting showered and dressed each morning, responding to e-mails and ordering online shopping.

In general, think about things that you have done in the past when you have been in very stressful circumstances, and use these strategies to help you to cope.

Other helpful ideas include:

- **Limiting your news intake:** Keep a limit on the amount of time spent on news surrounding the virus. Choose a book or unrelated articles to read instead. If you wish to access information about the virus or next steps, try to obtain this from reliable sources and not from social media, which may contain misinformation that feeds stress and anxiety
- **Keep busy whilst keeping rested:** Plan your days out to include recovery time, the things you need to do for work/school/your other commitments, and time for leisure and hobbies

Remember that in the vast majority of cases, there is a good recovery trajectory for COVID-19. Whatever your current circumstances, the likelihood is that things will get better soon.

Remember that this is temporary. If you find yourself preoccupied with the immediate future, try to mentally 'time travel' to make plans for what you will be doing this time next month or year.

Sometimes when we are experiencing strong emotions, we forget to look after our physical health. Whether you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or are currently asymptomatic, **make sure that you are taking steps to look after your physical health.** Refer to medical guidance and ensure that you are eating and drinking enough and taking rest to help your body fight the virus.

Learn more about other ways to take care of your mental health during the pandemic [here](#).



What to do next

Once you've managed your emotional response to testing positive, there are practical steps you can take to manage your situation.

Practical steps

You will need to familiarise yourself with the [current guidance](#) on how to manage your positive result. This is changing as the situation develops. Getting up to date information from reliable sources will help you to understand your next steps.

There may be practical steps that you can take to prepare yourselves for what may come next. These include:

- Seek out information to allow you to make informed decisions and to bring more of the situation under your control, wherever possible (e.g. where you can go for PCR testing, when and how you need to make contact with authorities or medical professionals etc.)
- Making a (flexible) plan of what to pack, who to contact, and other logistical arrangements should you need to go to isolation or for treatment

Being prepared for being sent to an isolation facility can help make your time in isolation more manageable. Visit our webpage [here](#) for more tips to prepare yourself.





Make decisions whilst feeling calm

You are likely to have a number of decisions to make once you test positive. Making decisions when under stress can be incredibly difficult - anxiety can influence decision making and lead us to choose options that may not be best for us. Take a moment to process what is happening before making any decisions; speak with a family or friend (virtually), take a few moments to simply breathe, and research your options accordingly. No matter what, it is important to ensure your physical health is made a priority and follow all medical guidelines and procedures in place.

In summary

Receiving a positive COVID-19 test result can be incredibly stressful. It is important to monitor and manage your emotional reaction to this experience whilst taking care of your physical health and attending to any practical decisions that are required.

If you are really struggling with your mental health, please reach out to your mental health professional or your supporting network.

Hospital Specialist Out-Patient Clinics (SOPCs) arrangement

- If you are currently under compulsory isolation/quarantine, compulsory testing, or you do not feel comfortable attending an appointment in the hospital or clinic, please call the clinic or hospital to reschedule for an appointment.
- If you are running out of medication, please contact the clinic or hospital (contact information of SOPCs can be found [here](#)). Hospital staff may be able to arrange a medication refill for you. Please bring along your appointment slip and HKID to collect your refill.
- You can also ask somebody else to collect medication refill on your behalf. They will need to bring along your copy of appointment slip and HKID in order to collect the medication refill.
- More details on special arrangement for Special Out-Patient Clinics (SOPCs) services can be found [here](#).

Seeking help through the private sector

- If you do not feel comfortable attending an appointment, please contact the clinic to discuss alternative options with your therapists, such as reschedule or opt for a phone or video call appointment.

If you do not have mental health support in place, this may be a good time to consider reaching out to seek professional help to support your mental health. **Visit our website** for a list of hotlines and services available for individuals who are affected by the pandemic.

Hotline/services

24-hour hotline counselling services

- The Samaritans (Multilingual): 2896 0000
- Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): 2389 2222
- Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre 24-hour (Cantonese only): 18288

Hong Kong Red Cross - COVID Support Hotline

- Service hours: Monday - Sunday, 10am - 10pm
- Hotline: 3628 1185

The Social Welfare Department - Enquiry hotline

- Service hours: Mon - Fri: 9 am - 5pm; Sat: 9 - 12nn; 24-hour interactive enquiry system
- Hotline: 2343 2255

Joyful Mental Health Foundation - Emotional Support Hotline Service

- Service hour: Mon - Fri: 10am - 1pm, 2 - 5pm; Sat: 10am - 1pm
- Hotline: 2301 2303

HKU Department of Psychiatry - Headwind online support service

- Service registration: hku.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AnA4YnCcghUyup

Open up - Online supporting services

- 24-hour
- Facebook/ Instagram/ Wechat: hkopenup
- Link: <https://www.openup.hk/index.htm?lang=en>

You can also find a list of mental health services provided by local organisations from our **community directory**.

Learn more about seeking help in Hong Kong **here**.

Visit our webpage **here** for more information on managing mental health problems and symptoms during COVID-19.

About Mind HK

Mind HK (Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited) is a S88 registered charity (91/16471), which launched in 2017. Our vision is to ensure no one in Hong Kong has to face a mental health problem alone. Through resources, training, and outreach campaigns and programmes, we help to educate around mental health and remove the associate stigma, with the aim of achieving the best mental health for all in Hong Kong. With existing collaboration and research efforts, we are here to support Hong Kong in becoming a global leader and regional model for public mental health. For more on our work, mission and vision, please visit www.mind.org.hk.

Useful Resources

If you want to learn more about other mental health topics, please visit **our**

Mental Health A to Z:

www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/

COVID-19 resources:

- [COVID-19 Mental Health Tips](#)
- [Mandatory Isolation Tips](#)
- [Pandemic Fatigue](#)
- [COVID-19 self-help guide](#)

If you are in an emergency or crisis situation, please contact 999, or go to your nearest A&E.

More local urgent support in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/find-help-now

More non-urgent support can be found here:

mind.org.hk/community-directory/

How & where to seek help in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/getting-help/



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