



**Quad Cities COVID-19 Coalition  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 6, 2020

**Current COVID-19 case count**

**Scott County** – Total of 1,642

Total deaths in Scott County: 14

**Rock Island County** – 14 new cases since Wednesday; total of 1,693

Currently in hospital: 17

Total deaths in Rock Island County: 34

“We are sad to report that another person in Rock Island County has died from COVID-19,” said Nita Ludwig, administrator of the Rock Island County Health Department. “We understand that everyone is tired of COVID-19, but it’s not going away anytime soon. Please continue to reduce the spread of the virus by staying home as much as possible, washing your hands frequently, and socially distancing and wearing a face covering when you must be out.”

**Today’s call**

A video recording of today’s media briefing can be found at

<https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/covid19/news>

**We must work together**

Remarks from Edward Rivers, director of the Scott County Health Department

Since Wednesday, two additional COVID-19 related deaths of Scott County residents were reported by the Iowa Department of Public Health. One individual was in the older adult age group (61-80) and the other in the middle age group (41-60). We share our deepest sympathies with the family and friends of these individuals.

We must work together to slow the spread of this virus and protect the health of all in our community. We ask all residents to play their part by wearing a face covering when in public and keeping physical distance from others, ensuring at least 6 feet between yourself and others outside of your household.

We know this pandemic continues to take a toll on our community. A prolonged pandemic affects not only the vitality and economic stability of a community, but the mental health of its residents. We appreciate having one of our many partners from the mental health field here to address this very issue.

## **Ways to reduce stress during the pandemic**

Remarks from Anne McNelis, LCSW, and clinical director for Transitions Mental Health Services, Moline

### **About the QC Behavioral Health Coalition**

The QC Behavioral Health Coalition is a collective alliance of area organizations, professional and providers that are working collaboratively and across sectors to advance the mental and behavioral health of residents in the Quad Cities. The goals of this coalition are to: promote mental health awareness, to drive innovative programs and initiatives; to measure our progress and showcase our results; and to identify and pursue new resources for behavioral health services in the QCA.

Representation on this coalition includes more than 50 area behavioral health organizations, social service providers and governmental entities.

### **How has Transitions and other partners responded to change in delivery services and demands as a result of COVID?**

In mid-March, we quickly shifted the majority of our mental health services to virtual mental health options, including telehealth/video interaction and phone sessions. Many of our partner agencies in the state, as well as across the nation, also moved their services to what we call “remote services.” Counseling, therapy and psychiatric services for our clients became adaptable to doing video calls. And in the event where clients did not have access to internet, computers/tablets or app devices, we’ve continued services through phone sessions.

We have seen steady engagement with many of our clients during this transition, but we certainly saw challenges for our client families that were trying to juggle online schooling and work, whereas previously we provided onsite school-based therapy services.

As an organization, our agency has followed protocols similar to many other businesses by implementing a small work force onsite at our locations, so as to implement social distancing while keeping our office locations open to the public. Our staff wear masks when at work, and when people from the public enter the building they are required to wear masks, follow social distancing and are assessed for exposure risks.

In some cases, we have clients who have really appreciated the telehealth delivery of service and have expressed a desire to continue with this method, post-COVID times. However, we also see “COVID fatigue” with many others and a wish to return to in person social connections. We completely understand the pros/cons to both of these options right now and continue to attend to the Gov. JB Pritzker’s phased restrictions while carefully weighing the county’s growth rate of cases.

### **What type of toll does a prolonged event like the pandemic have on mental health?**

The ongoing uncertainty of world-wide pandemic brings significant life changes and unprecedented stressors — long periods of quarantining and social distancing, the fear of contracting the illness, economic uncertainty including higher unemployment rates — all have direct, negative effects to our mental health. We also must consider that compounding our stress is the fact that we are living in socially strife times. We are experiencing an epidemic of racial injustices occurring across our nation. These events create heightened acute and prolonged stress that can activate our “fight-flight-freeze” response system in our bodies. Prolonged activation of this bodily system can wreak havoc on our sleep, mood, appetite, behavior and our physical wellness.

I think many of us can relate to the more vulnerable ways we coped in the beginning of the shutdown. There was disruption to work/home life structure, as we had to rapidly shift to school closures and new routines. We had too much media exposure, and we turned to comfort eating and saw a drop off in exercise, sleep disruption, emotional mood swings/increased anxiety, feeling emotionally isolated, negative thoughts and worries, feeling very internally tuned in.

The more recent data on the impact on American’s mental health shows we’ve experienced an increase in stress-related disorders. Both anxiety and depression **have more than tripled** during the pandemic, according to John Hopkins University survey released in June. The biggest prevalence of mental health problems was found among young adults between 18-29 years old. With a jump from 3.4 percent in April 2018 to a whopping 24 percent reporting psychological distress this past April. Also, lower-income households, those who posed vulnerable mental health risks prior to COVID19, those in poverty, people of color, those in domestic violent situations and those who have been unemployed for consecutive months are at particular risk for depression and stress-related mental and physical health conditions, including substance abuse.

According to a recent report from the American Psychological Association, “Stress in America 2020”:

- The economy is now a significant source of stress for more than 70 percent of Americans. This figure rivals that which we saw with the 2008 Great Recession.
- The federal government’s response to our current crises is causing stress to 67 percent of Americans
- More than one-third of Americans have displayed clinical signs of anxiety, depression or both since the pandemic began. For those experiencing financial difficulties, the figure is even higher at 55 percent
- Only 50 percent of American employees feel comfortable/safe discussing mental health issues and seeking mental health help. Fear of retaliation or firing for seeking mental health treatment is a significant concern in our U.S. workforce.

- 1 in 5 Americans have had a physical reaction when thinking about the pandemic. Stress and anxiety often manifests itself in physical reactions or symptoms in our body.
- The federal disaster distress hotline, run by the SAMSHA dept., reported an increase of 1,000 more text messages in April compared to 1,790 in April of 2019. The hotline can be reached at 800-985-5990.
- And the research tells us that the long-term psychological consequences of collective trauma can last a decade or more.

Source: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress>

### Tips to ease stress:

The biggest, best tip I can give anyone, no matter your age, status or roles in life is to set a goal of “Staying Regulated.” Self-regulation is the practice of managing one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while we pursue longer-term goals. It is a critical skill for professionals, leaders, and parents. And as adults, it is a truly important skill to develop in our children.

Stressful times call on us to tap into our resilience and self-regulation is a cornerstone of our resilience. The following tools I’m going to share with you are adapted from Dr. Bruce Perry’s Neurosequential Network Model of Resilience:

- **Build structure into your day.** Aim to keep and continue routine, especially during times of unpredictability. Having predictable daily routines, expectations, boundaries around meals, bedtime, chores, work, exercise and play allows us to tolerate stress more effectively. It calms both our brain and our body and helps us to regulate our emotions.
- **Have family mealtimes.** This is such a great way to create or preserve structure or routine, especially with our kids. We can socially connect around food, make a point to check in our days, share stories and laugh. Social connection releases particular endorphins in our brains that bring calm and happiness to our bodies.
- **Limit your media time.** Today’s media has a way of quickly activating our body and causing dysregulation in our mood. Have you noticed a rise in anxiety, tension or fear when you jump on social or news media? Fear-based news, violence, and negativity sends our brains and that of our children’s into the primitive part of our brain. The part that is responsible for fear, aggression, anger, anxiety. Practicing self-awareness and noticing our bodily reaction to media and limiting our time and children’s time on this tool and instead look for opportunities to create more.
- **Creativity, play and exercise.** Get our bodies and our kid’s bodies moving (while practicing social distancing). As I said before, we are living in a time when we are more often in a heightened state of emotional arousal, and the only way to move out of that anxious/fearful-driven state is to engage in activities that require meditative breathing and or patterned, rhythmic moving. So I’m talking about here is: walking, running, dancing, singing, yoga, meditation, swinging on a swing, riding a bike, jumping rope,

playing a musical instrument, coloring, knitting, creating. These rhythmic activities have a way of calming super anxious states of being into less aroused, more cooperative and relationally connected ways of behaving. Remember this: Activity and Creativity is the Balm for Anxious Brains and Bodies.

- **Reaching Out.** The most powerful buffer in times of stress and distress is our social connectedness. So let's prioritize physically distancing with emotional connection. Reach out and connect. And if you are struggling to do this, reach out for professional help to get support.
- **Helping others.** There are so many in our community who have experienced adversity in the past and are in a state of vulnerability right now. Reaching out to help others, especially if we come from a place of privilege! We have a wonderfully, robust service-oriented community and we have social justice organizations growing and trying to address the inequities in our communities. When we step outside of ourselves and help others in need, we not only help our health and healing — we build a stronger, healthier community.
- **Practice good sleep hygiene.** I think many of us have had our sleep disrupted during this pandemic. Whether it means having difficulty falling asleep, sleeping longer or not enough, our heightened state of arousal is creating this disruption. Try to incorporate exercise at an ideal time, while practicing calming activities at night. Try to avoid late-night eating or media. Practice mindfulness techniques to help you fall asleep; listen to calm, repetitive, rhythmic sounds on an app to help induce relaxation.
- **Stay positive and future focused.** When we can stay calm and regulated there is a contagion effect — those around us feel less stressed. Practice healthy behaviors: “fill your cup” with creativity, movement, laughter and humor, social connection, reading/writing. And remember to be gentle with yourself. Practice self-compassion. Realize we won't be as “productive” as we once were, and this isn't such a bad thing. We are living in a trying and unprecedented time and we need to be kind to others, as well as ourselves. Our mental health and well-being depends on it.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pulling-through/202004/the-pandemic-toolkit-parents-need>

### **How would a person know if they've reached a point where they could use some services?**

If you are struggling with the previous tips, more days than not. If you are struggling with your day-to-day functioning, if you find your mood or anxiety level is impacting how you behave, relate or not follow through on responsibilities. If your socially isolating and find yourself experiencing really hopeless, dark, negative thoughts more days than not. These are all signs you could be experiencing a heightened mental health issue. It's OK to make a call and inquire about help, even if you're not sure you need it. Mental health services are private, confidential and voluntary.

If you don't have insurance, there are a number of funding sources that are available to local mental health providers to assist those who are uninsured or underinsured. Local mental health providers have that information to access those funds when someone calls for services.

### **What can the community do to support mental health now and beyond the pandemic?**

- Join in the fight against mental health stigma by creating opportunities within organizations, businesses, schools and systems to openly talk about the importance of mental health as part of our overall health and well-being. We need to align discussions of mental health with wellness in our places of business and promote both, collectively: encourage businesses to incorporate wellness topics in their orientations and trainings; train leadership in all systems to recognize signs of depression and suicide and what resources are available for their employees and their families.
- Our community can commit to addressing trauma on all levels impacting our children, families, adults. This pandemic provides an opportunity for an even greater understanding of collective trauma and trauma's impact to highly vulnerable populations. Becoming trauma-informed communities and systems will directly help heal the collective traumatic burden we are experiencing.
- This is a time for innovative thinking, partnerships and new initiatives to be birthed. We will see the impact of this pandemic and social injustices for decades to come, and we must invest in collective healing, not for one aspect of our society but for all of us. A truly healthy community is one that is invested health and healing of every individual.

### **More information**

- [www.TogetherQC.com](http://www.TogetherQC.com)
- [coronavirus.iowa.gov](http://coronavirus.iowa.gov)
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=2>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/countymetrics?county=Rock%20Island>
- <https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/facilities/Pages/Covid19Response.aspx>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/long-term-care-facility-outbreaks-covid-19>

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