

# Pro-Longed Isolation Raises Mental Health Concerns

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EDWARDSVILLE — As residents head into their sixth week under a stay-at-home order and another four to come, mental health concerns are being raised.

“As the pandemic wears on, it is likely the mental health burden will increase as measures taken to slow the spread of the virus lead to greater isolation and potential financial distress,” Deborah Humphrey, director of Madison County Mental Health Board, said. “Lives have now been lost which has had a deeper emotional impact on families, friends and medical professionals.”

The Regional Disaster Mental Health Volunteer response team has created a new Support Line to respond to the stressors that our local medical professionals and first responders are experiencing. This includes those who provide healthcare in long term care and assisted living centers and trained, licensed professionals are available to offer support and resources by calling (618) 381-5173. “We want them to know, people are here to support your heroic efforts,” Humphrey said.

Humphrey said the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have negatively affected many people’s mental health and created new barriers for people already suffering from mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

“Our mental health providers have done a tremendous job in moving quickly to adapt services to be responsive to the impact of the pandemic and ensure help is available to any individual feeling distressed,” Humphrey said.

Touchette Regional Hospital, now providing outpatient behavioral health services in Madison County has implemented a new Mental Health Support and Resource Line answered by trained therapy staff. Anyone who is struggling can call (618) 482-7158 at any time.

In April, the state also announced a text line that allows Illinois residents to talk to a mental health professional, free of charge, during the COVID-19 crisis. The program, called “Call4Calm,” was launched by the state’s Human Services Mental Health Division.

Illinois residents wanting to speak to a mental health care professional can text the word “TALK” to 552020, and the service is free to use. Humphrey said with new state-wide telehealth programs and the mental health support hotline she sees it as a positive.

“There has been a movement toward telehealth in the mental health field for a number of years and this technology is increasing,” Humphrey said. There is a lack of psychiatry /psychiatrists in the United States and many areas have to rely on this now, particularly rural areas who are even more under-resourced.”

She said telehealth has been an effective treatment tool even with children.

Mental health stigma may prevent individuals from seeking mental health treatment for fear that someone will see them, adding to their stress. Others may find it difficult to seek treatment if they reside in a rural area where services are less available and where lack of transportation becomes a barrier to getting to treatment.

“Telehealth is more private, it can be done in the person’s home where they feel safe and removes barriers to access,” Humphrey said.

There are various platforms though virtual and telehealth individual and support groups, social media, and crisis mental health services. Telehealth-Virtual Mental Health Services are available in Madison County at Centerstone of Illinois, Inc. through the Open Access services at (618) 462-2331 and Chestnut Health Systems, Central Access, (618) 877- 4420.

Humphrey said there are added stresses with someone experiencing economic stress, unemployment and food insecurity that increases feelings of depression and hopelessness. She said it is estimated that the coronavirus has the potential to result in a 20 percent increase in unemployment and a spike of up to 20,000 suicide deaths in the United States and Europe.

“Social distancing and social isolation can create a high level of stress, anxiety, sleep difficulties, agitation-anger and depression,” Humphrey said “For individuals who have an existing mental health disorder this may have an even greater impact. The longer the duration, there is greater risk of deterioration of one’s coping mechanisms.”

She said there is speculation that the suicide rate will go up during the pandemic and research has demonstrated that feeling alone, hopeless or a burden to others are feelings individuals have reported leading to suicide. With the state’s extended 30-day shelter-in-place order that started Friday, there are greater concerns for those who suffer from mental health issues, she said.

“Individuals are cut off from their support systems,” Humphrey said. “It puts someone at a higher risk of depression that can lead to suicidal ideations, intent or attempt and is further complicated by the economic issues.”

In Madison County, there are supports in place aimed at suicide prevention and a number of support sessions for mental health and addictions. Substance use is also on the increase and combined with depression can place a person in a state of reducing the fear of death by suicide. Virtual meetings are available through Narcotics and Alcoholic Anonymous, call (618) 398-9409 or email metroeastnapr@gmail.com.

The Madison County Mental Health Board funds 14 mental health agencies that serve county residents. Local COVID-19 resources are posted on its website and using social media <https://www.facebook.com/co.madison.il.us> to share information with the general public.