

Lights 'n Sirens: Staying Healthy During COVID-19

By Flo Lennox

Congratulations! The 101 days of summer will end soon.

But...

We are about to enter the annual flu season while fighting the COVID-19 virus. The biggest immediate threats are boredom and restlessness. As time goes on, loneliness and depression will be added to the list. For those with preexisting mental illness, the stress of all of this may very well be taking a more dramatic toll.

Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two.

Common symptoms of both COVID-19 and flu include:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults

Other signs and symptoms of COVID-19 may include sudden change in or loss of taste or smell.

As people practice their physical distancing and hole up in their homes, two prominent feelings are likely to emerge, boredom and restlessness. Many are already experiencing these feelings. As benign as these might sound to some people, boredom and restlessness can get people into trouble if they last a long time.

Humans are creatures of habit. Schedules and responsibilities differ, but most people have a routine. Routines keep us on task and productive. They allow us to accomplish the things that we have prioritized in our lives – our careers or jobs, having a family, taking care of elderly parents, taking care of pets, spending time with friends, getting projects done around the house.

When our routines are disrupted, accomplishing the priorities in our lives can be severely compromised. Many people begin to feel lost. They aren't quite sure what they are supposed to be doing with their time. They begin to have too much free time on their hands. They come up with some tasks to do, but at the end of the day, they may feel that they didn't accomplish as much as they normally do. This leaves them feeling distressed, bored, or restless.

Most Americans have developed a bad habit over the past decade or so. We are addicted to our smartphones. Many people have trouble with free moments, even just a few minutes. It's hard for them to tolerate just being alone with their thoughts. It feels like a waste of time. They pull out their smartphones and launch into another world. A world that is constantly going. A world that allows us to be connected all of the time. We can immediately see what's happening in the news, or in our emails, or on social media. We don't want to miss anything.

Our smartphones don't contribute much. Sure, they can be a great tool to communicate with each other, or share photos, or check for urgent work emails. Yes, there are certainly some valid and necessary uses of our smartphones. But all too often, they are simply used to fill time or to distract us from our own thoughts.

With too much free time on people's hands given the current crisis – and

the lack of their normal work or school routines – many people will default to this bad habit, and simply spend more time on their smartphones. Alternatively, they may watch a lot more television, much more than they already do. Either of these activities can be great for filling time, but at the end of the day, they can leave people feeling lost, without a sense of meaning and purpose.

Interestingly, this sense of meaning and purpose is quite important, not only to mental health but also to physical health.

One of the biggest risks to the health and wellness of Americans is the risk for increased use of alcohol, marijuana, and other recreational drugs. If people are no longer going to work, either due to work-from-home requirements or layoffs, it can seem like a perfectly reasonable thing to have a drink or two, or maybe some marijuana, to calm down and relax at the end of a day. We are all safe and sound in our homes anyway. Why not? We all like to relax during our staycations.

Others may be worried and stressed in unbelievable ways, panicked about their jobs or their retirement accounts. They may feel that they need something to help get their minds off of all of this bad news. They may have trouble sleeping. They might believe that alcohol or other recreational drugs will help.

The first thing is to be aware of the risks. Take an inventory of where you and your loved ones are at on these items. Watch for worrisome patterns emerging. Talk to each other about these issues. Don't be afraid to discuss these difficult topics. Be kind to each other. Show concern for those who you know are struggling. Let them know it's normal that they are worried, or stressed, or feeling empty or confused. Also, let them know that you want to help them

find a way to deal with all of this.

So here is the best advice: Know your risks. If you get sick, call your doctor. Wear masks and physical distance. Wash you hands often. Make sure you check in on your friends, neighbors, and loved ones from a safe distance.

Here's a short list of things you should have on hand.

- Fever and pain relievers
- Cough syrups and drops
- Nasal sprays
- Decongestants
- Thermometer
- Fluids - Pediasure for kids
- Tissues

(Before giving any medicine to children consult their pediatrician. Cold and cough syrups can be dangerous especially when given to children under 2 years old. Adults with chronic problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease should check in with their doctor or pharmacist before taking any flu remedy.)

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Vote-By Mail in Oregon *continued from front page*

a conservative think tank which has documented voter fraud in an effort to demonstrate the issue is a problem. Instead, the Heritage Foundation's data base, which they do say is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list, shows just 15 total cases in Oregon since 2000, with several of those listed as ballot petition fraud. By comparison they list 30 convicted cases in Kentucky since 2000 (a state with a similar population

to Oregon that does not use VBM), with the majority of those listed as "Buying Votes." Numerous other studies (The Brennan Center, Columbia University, Arizona State University) have found similar results. A 2014 study published by the Washington Post found 31 credible instances of impersonation fraud from 2000 to 2014, out of more than 1 billion ballots cast, and a review of the 2016 election found just four document-

ed cases of voter fraud. The fact that there are documented and convicted cases of voter fraud solidifies the point that the systems in place for verifying voters and identifying fraud are sound, there just isn't any proof that it happens often enough to be consequential.



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