

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Viruses Don't Discriminate and Neither Does the Opportunity to Promote and Protect Brain Health

One aspect of brain health is a sense of well-being, for example, experiencing health, happiness, and prosperity. Fear and anxiety (emotions many of us are experiencing with the outbreak of coronavirus disease – COVID-19), can have a negative impact on feelings of well-being.

One of the things you can do to prevent some of that fear and anxiety – for both yourself and others in the community – is to not discriminate against people you may associate with COVID-19. Remember, viruses don't discriminate —just like brain illness, they are an equal opportunity offender. Viruses attack any immune system with which they come in contact.

According to the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, groups of people who may be experiencing stigma because of COVID-19 include:

- Individuals of Asian descent
- People who have traveled, especially to “high-risk” regions
- Emergency responders or healthcare professionals
- People who had the virus or have been quarantined and recovered from the virus
- People who are showing seasonal allergy symptoms such as runny nose or cough

Stigma can result in negative brain health consequences to those being stigmatized, as well as the person passing judgement. Stigma can also create an environment of general mistrust or anger in a community. Actions like these erode our community's brain health and increase risk for brain illness at the individual and population level. Knowing the facts and sharing them with those around you can help reduce stigma and promote everyone's sense of well-being.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Coronavirus, just like brain illness, doesn't recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity.

COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China. Chinese ancestry—or any other ancestry—does not make a person more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Wearing a mask does not mean a person is sick with COVID-19. The CDC recommends everyone wear a cloth mask while out in public. People around the world wear masks for cultural or social reasons, to avoid pollen or air pollution or to avoid getting sick. Don't assume someone has COVID-19 just because they are wearing a mask.

Combat stigma by sharing accurate information about COVID-19. Avoid spreading misinformation. Stay informed through reliable, trusted sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.

Say something if you see, read, or hear misinformation or discriminatory information.

Politely correct the misinformation and remind the speaker that stigmatized language and behaviors increase fear and make us all less safe.

Show empathy and support for those most closely impacted. Create learning opportunities that go against discriminatory and misinformed ideas. Listen, be empathetic, and, with permission, share the stories of people experiencing stigma, along with a message that discrimination is not acceptable.

Compiled Based On:

- Center for Disease Control (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>

- King County, Washington:

<https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus/anti-stigma.aspx>