



# COVID-19: Youth Mental Health & Substance Use

## FACTSHEET

### In Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on young people's mental health.

Youth aged 15-24 are less likely to report excellent or very good mental health than other age groups: **less than half** (41.5%) of youth rate their mental health as excellent or very good.<sup>1</sup>

According to a survey of 622 youth in Ontario, young people feel that their mental health has **declined** since the start of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

### What are young people in Ontario most concerned about at this time?<sup>3</sup>

-  **Mental health issues**, including anxiety and depression
-  **Service disruptions** and unmet needs
-  **Loved ones** becoming ill with COVID-19
-  **Becoming ill** with COVID-19
-  Disruptions to **education and career** plans

We can remind youth that feelings of stress and anxiety are normal. When our regular routines are disrupted, we may have to find ways to adapt our usual strategies for coping with difficult emotions.

### How can young people take care of their mental health during this period?

01. Stick to a routine



02. Stay active



03. Eat well



04. Get proper rest and sleep



05. Practice mindfulness\*



06. Limit their news intake



07. Stay connected



### What do youth need to know about cannabis and COVID-19?

There is **no evidence** that cannabis can prevent or treat COVID-19. In fact, we know that smoking and vaping cannabis can have **negative effects on the respiratory system**, and a compromised respiratory system can increase your likelihood of contracting COVID-19 and worsen respiratory symptoms of the disease.<sup>4</sup>

Research suggests that individuals who smoke are **more likely to experience severe outcomes** of COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>

## While substance use has declined among most youth during this time, some youth do report using substances to cope.<sup>6</sup>

For youth who use substances, the following **eight evidence-based guidelines**<sup>7,8</sup> can be shared to support young people in reducing the risk.



**Wash your hands** with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before preparing and using substances.



**Prepare** your substances yourself.



**Don't share supplies** (including e-cigarettes, pipes, bongs, and joints).



**Go slow** if you've accessed substances from a new source.



**Avoid stockpiling** alcohol, cannabis, and other substances.



**Plan and prepare for an adverse reaction** or even an overdose. For example, avoid using substances in secret or when you are alone or behind locked doors, and have naloxone on hand if you are using opioids.



**Monitor your use** – pay attention to how often, when, and where you are using.



**Reach out for help** if you feel your use is becoming a problem.

## RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

### \***TOOLKIT: Mindfulness-Based Programs for Youth: A Toolkit for Youth Workers**

Developed by the **Holistic Arts-Based Program & YouthREX**, 2020.

<https://youthrex.com/toolkit/mindfulness-based-programs-for-youth-a-toolkit-for-youth-workers>

### **TOOLKIT: Coronavirus Anxiety Workbook: A Tool to Help You Build Resilience During Difficult Times**

Developed by **The Wellness Society**, 2020.

<https://youthrex.com/toolkit/coronavirus-anxiety-workbook-a-tool-to-help-you-build-resilience-during-difficult-times>

## RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUTH IN MAKING A CHANGE IN THEIR SUBSTANCE USE

### **FACTSHEET: Stages of Change Framework**

Developed by **YouthREX**, 2017.

<https://youthrex.com/factsheet/stages-of-change-framework>

### **TOOLKIT: You & Substance Use: Stuff to Think About... And Ways to Make Changes**

Developed by the **Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research**, 2011.

<https://youthrex.com/toolkit/you-substance-use-stuff-to-think-about-and-ways-to-make-changes>

## REFERENCES

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- 2 Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH). (2020, May 29). *How is COVID-19 affecting youth mental health, substance use & wellness?* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/CentreforAddictionandMentalHealth/videos/783104915554925>
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- 5 Varvadas, C. I., & Nikitara, K. (2020). COVID-19 and smoking: A systematic review of the evidence. *Tobacco Induced Diseases*, 18(20). <https://doi.org/10.18332/tid/119324>
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- 7 Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) & Mental Health Commission of Canada (2020). *Coping with stress, anxiety, and substance use during COVID-19*. <https://www.ccsa.ca/coping-stress-anxiety-and-substance-use-during-covid-19-infographic>
- 8 Manitoba Harm Reduction Network. (2020). *COVID-19 harm reduction tips*. <https://mhrn.ca/s/COVID-19-for-PWUD-Infographic.pdf>