

# Health and Safety During a Response: Psychosocial Impacts



During an animal health emergency response, responders will be involved with or exposed to a number of physical and psychological stresses, many of which can have psychosocial impacts. It is important to recognize the signs of psychological distress, and take steps to minimize their effects.

## Psychological Stressors

- Deployment
  - Stressful for responder and their families
  - Disruption of regular schedule
  - Being away from home and family
  - Unfamiliar environment
  - New people
- Working Conditions
  - Long work hours
  - Physically demanding work
  - Limited or lack of resources
- Assigned Tasks
  - Prolonged exposure to injury, death, destruction
  - Performing euthanasia and depopulation
  - Public perception/support
  - Lack of appreciation

## Signs of Psychological Stress

The effects of psychological stress can manifest in a number of ways. These include physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral manifestations.

- Physical
  - Fatigue, body aches and pains
  - Nausea, headache
  - Rapid heart rate, sweats and chills
  - Muscle twitching
- Cognitive
  - Confusion, disorientation
  - Poor concentration or alertness
  - Memory problems
  - Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Emotional
  - Anxiety
  - Fear
  - Irritability, anger
  - Depression, sense of failure
  - Helplessness, feeling overwhelmed

- Behavioral
  - Denial
  - Distrust
  - Blame
  - Withdrawal
  - Inability to relax
  - Excessive worry
  - Substance abuse

## Reducing Psychological Stress

- Pace yourself
- Take frequent rest breaks; take breaks away from work areas
- Try to maintain a normal schedule; regular eating and sleeping times
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid the use of caffeine when possible
- Eat a variety of foods; increase intake of complex carbs
- Communicate with loved ones
- Practice stress/relaxation techniques
- Be aware of psychological stress; monitor levels of stress in yourself as well as other responders
  - Seek assistance, when needed
- If a severe psychological disorder suspected, contact a health professional immediately
- Avoid substance abuse

## Additional Resources

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Health Services  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma/index.aspx#rh>

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