

# Combat the effects of social distancing while protecting our nation's most vulnerable



Our world and how we interact with each other has changed drastically in the past few weeks. We've all adjusted to a "new normal" that for many of us involves work-from-home arrangements. As a nation, we've been asked to avoid public gatherings and socially distance ourselves from each other.

With the constant updates surrounding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), it may help to understand why our local and national leaders recommend social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19.

In this article, Diane Russell, SVP, Marketing, Group Protection, Lincoln Financial, sat down with Carol Harnett, President, Council for Disability Awareness and Fred Schott, Director of Operations, Council for Disability Awareness, to discuss the purpose of social distancing and how to combat the potential effects caused by isolation.

To understand the purpose of social distancing, we first must understand the science, Harnett says.

A group of 50 Brookline, MA physicians wrote a letter to the public that explains how scientists measure the spread of the virus by a number called R0, or “R naught.” This number represents how many people can become infected from contact with one person with the illness.

For COVID-19, that number is currently around three, according to the physicians.

That means, according to the math, one person with COVID-19 can infect three people and those three will each give it to three others ultimately resulting in more than 14 million infected in 15 degrees of transmission.

“It’s astonishing,” Harnett says. “I think it makes people who aren’t used to looking at medical research feel like it has to be made up.”

Social distancing and quarantines help lower R0.

Up to 65% of Americans could get the virus, but most will have mild symptoms or no symptoms, according to a scientific review of four key scenarios presented by the CDC and shared with the New York Times.



“We’re worried about those people because they may not even know they have it,” Harnett says. “They’re walking around in the world if they don’t socially isolate, and they unwittingly become modern-day ‘Typhoid Mary’s.’”

Schott adds, “It’s not about you. Public health is about the general health of the community. It’s almost always about the most vulnerable.”

For COVID-19, the most vulnerable include older people, those with underlying medical conditions, people with asthma, people who are immunocompromised and pregnant women, according to the [CDC](#).

However, social distancing can create its own health problem: Loneliness.

Loneliness effects 30% of Americans, according to the [Unlonely Project](#), an initiative to improve societal health and wellness created by The Foundation for Art & Healing.



"There's two things going on now," Schott says. "There's the baseline of loneliness, and then we're layering social distancing on top of that."

Having both worked from home several years, Schott and Harnett offer advice to those struggling to adjust to remote work or social isolation.

- Reach out to your organization's employee resource group for remote and digital workers, if one exists.
- Instead of meeting for coffee, arrange a daily virtual huddle.
- Talk with friends.
- Go for a walk outside.
- Take a virtual group exercise class.

Fear and stress also factor into the public's general health.

"It's the nature of this pandemic, it's novel, something we haven't seen," Schott says. "It spreads at a frightening rate, we don't have a vaccine, we don't have anti-viral treatment and we don't know exactly how it spreads.

"There's tremendous uncertainty."

In an environment of fear and panic, it helps to find strategies to keep calm. Schott suggests practicing focused breathing and meditation.

He also recommends dialing back on the news consumption.

"Yes, things are moving fast and we need to stay in-the-know, but only do it a couple times a day, " he adds.

It's important to take an intentional approach in stay in touch with other people. Check on your friends and family and share how you're feeling.

"Build a sense of community," Schott says. "Make a conscious effort to remember that this is not about me, we are all in this together."

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