

# READINESS

## Why is this relevant?

During the covid-19 response, workers from across the healthcare system (and beyond) will be called upon to fight the disease outbreak. Ensuring that staff are prepared and ready to work is important for being able to safely and successfully tackle the virus. Readiness is relevant to staff transitioning between home and work daily, those returning to work after self-isolating (potentially as a result of contracting the virus or showing symptoms), and those being drafted in to provide extra support.

## Core constructs/concepts

Readiness to work or deploy is defined as having the mental and physical capabilities required to successfully perform a task and work without increased risk to the one's own and others' health and safety. Much of the existing work on this topic has been conducted with military personnel. However, there has also been some initial work examining the readiness of emergency responders. We can use the findings of existing research to understand how to support the readiness of covid-19 workers.

Based on existing literature, we know that when individuals feel ready to work/deploy they report:

- Feeling prepared and organised
- Having access to support from co-workers, friends and family
- Knowing how to do the job
- Knowing how to look after themselves
- Being ready to deal with unexpected events

A number of factors have been linked to readiness to work/deploy. These include:

- Physiological factors: being fit, healthy and well slept
- Psychological factors: being in good mental health
- Social factors: having an established support network
- Organisational factors: receiving the required training, equipment and support needed to do the job (e.g. confidence in the PPE equipment and decontamination procedures)
- Experience: having the skills needed to do the job
- Positive attitude towards training: having an open mind towards training and skill development
- Stress recovery: being able to manage stressors already experienced
- Stress (higher = lower readiness)

When individuals are ready to work, they are more likely to perform tasks safely and to a high standard. They are also more likely to be able to withstand and adjust to the job-related stressors they might encounter.



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## Practical recommendations

- To ensure readiness, workers should be encouraged to consider what they can do to feel prepared to tackle the demands they might face in the coming days, weeks and months. Key areas that can be focused on are physiological fitness, psychological preparedness, practical readiness and situational preparedness.
- **Physiological fitness:** E.g., Maintaining a healthy balanced diet and ensuring adequate sleep (i.e., 7-9 hours in a 24-hour cycle).
- **Psychological preparedness:** E.g., Developing a self-care plan, identifying effective coping mechanisms, explaining the situation to others so they can provide empathetic support, adopting a routine to enter/leave the work environment.
- **Practical readiness:** E.g., Trying to hand over tasks at home to others. For instance, if someone can help paying bills, taking care of rent and looking after children and pets, the impact of these additional stressors can be reduced.
- **Situational preparedness:** E.g., Reading and being up to date on current policies and ways of working, which might have been developed specifically for the covid-19 response. The organisation should be encouraged to provide relevant documents and clearly highlight which ones are critical for staff to read and understand at this busy time (e.g. Précis key points, keeping them simple and specific).
- Leaders should verbally emphasise the value of rest-recovery for the long-term performance and health of workers.
- The transition between work and home can be challenging, especially if workers have had a difficult day. To ensure readiness for the next day, focusing on nutrition, getting rest and sleep, possibly doing some exercise (depending on fatigue levels), and spending time on a task unconnected to work can be nourishing and will contribute to being ready the next day. Transition routines can be helpful for switching off from work mode when returning home. During the transition might be a good time to check in with colleagues or designated staff such as psychologists if available.
- Healthcare workers in self-isolation may feel frustrated at not being able to contribute to tackling the virus. However, if these workers are asymptomatic or their symptoms are mild, they might be encouraged to really try and value this time, practice some self-care and do (see points above) what they can to be ready for their return.

### Relevant literature

de Niet, B. L. M., Ravelli, A. C., Frings-Dresen, M. H., & Sluiter, J. K. (2017). DOCpass: A tool to assess readiness for work in surgeons and anaesthetists to improve and ensure the safety of surgical patients. *Perioperative Care and Operating Room Management*, 8, 19-28.

Zagelbaum, N. K., Heslin, K. C., Stein, J. A., Ruzek, J., Smith, R. E., Nyugen, T., & Dobalian, A. (2014). Factors influencing readiness to deploy in disaster response: findings from a cross-sectional survey of the Department of Veterans Affairs Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System. *BMC emergency medicine*, 14(1), 16.

UNHCR Emergency Handbook: Getting ready for your emergency deployment <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/45259/getting-ready-for-your-emergency-deployment>