

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: COVID-19, Alcohol Use Disorder and Anxiety**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has been the main topic of conversation on television, social media, and in homes over the last few months. As more cases have come to light across the U.S., the pandemic has affected every American, causing widespread panic and uncertainty in this trying time.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) if you're currently struggling with an alcohol use disorder (AUD), this pandemic brings to the surface a unique set of concerns of its own. An AUD is a chronic, relapsing disease that is diagnosed based on an individual meeting a certain set of criteria within a 12-month period. Regardless of the amount of alcohol a person consumes though, since alcohol consumption can weaken immune systems over time, any person with problematic drinking behaviors can be amongst the most vulnerable populations for getting COVID-19. While flattening the curve is the nation's priority right now, the unique needs of an individual battling alcoholism are equally as urgent—maybe even more so during this time of social distancing and home quarantines.

With the threat of COVID-19, a person with problematic drinking behaviors may face Anxiety, Loneliness, an alcohol-related decrease in immune system health and the potential for increased susceptibility to certain infectious processes and drastically restricted access to alcohol, which may lead to symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

Individuals who are struggling with alcohol amid the ongoing threat of COVID-19, are especially susceptible to anxiety. Anxious for themselves or their loved ones enhances feelings of unease. Additionally, not fully understanding the potential of what this virus can do, receiving contradictory information on television and online, and the fear of losing financial support contributes heavily to feelings of anxiety. However, reaching for a glass of alcohol can enhance anxiety or make it more likely for problematic patterns of alcohol use to start or continue.

Studies show that there is a clear relationship between anxiety and AUDs. Both prolonged drinking and alcohol withdrawal are associated with an increased incidence of anxiety. One study estimated that 18.3% of people with general anxiety disorder self-medicated their condition with alcohol while 3.3%

self-medicated with alcohol because of panic disorders. Additionally, nearly 13% of people with anxiety who self-medicated with alcohol developed an AUD, based on the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. To combat feelings of anxiety, it may be helpful to stay off social media sites or limit the amount of time you spend watching the news each day. Being proactive about your mental health can help reduce triggers that may keep you in a constant state of worry. While the threat of COVID-19 is real, mental health should be a main priority as well. Get outside, go for a walk or run, eat balanced meals, and make restful sleep a priority.

In an effort to flatten the curve and minimize the spread of the coronavirus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have advised Americans to abide by social distancing strategies, by staying home, keeping 6 ft. away from others in public, and at this time, congregating in groups no larger than 10 people. The challenge with this recommendation, though, is that if you are struggling with alcohol abuse or have an AUD, you may already be feeling alone. Studies have shown social withdrawal increases loneliness and depression, which themselves may be factors associated with substance abuse. In these cases, isolating from friends and family, while important to minimizing the spread of COVID-19, may have an unintended adverse effect as it may take away one's ability to socialize with their support system. As we all continue to socially distance ourselves, some programs have also begun offering virtual 12-Step meetings.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction". For more information please visit [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency that conducts and supports health promotion, prevention and preparedness activities in the United States, with the goal of improving overall public health. To learn more about the CDC please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is concerned about COVID-19 and seeks to educate the community about its negative consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org)