

# For many, 'Superstorm' sandy could take toll on mental health

November 1 2012, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter

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Flooding after Hurricane Sandy.  
Photo: National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration

People who were impacted by the event will have symptoms, but they should fade, experts say.

(HealthDay)—Some of the numbers are staggering: more than 75 Americans dead, thousands evacuated from their homes, millions left without power for days and billions of dollars in damage from "superstorm" Sandy.

Psychologists say the effect of all this sudden, violent loss on people's psyches will be powerful.

Not only those who suffered the loss of a loved one or a beloved home, but also people who just watched the constant storm coverage may be scared and unsettled, experts say.

"Sandy, like all [natural disasters](#), is considered a criterion 'A1' [stressor](#) in

the diagnoses of [Acute Stress Disorder](#) in the first month after the event and [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (PTSD), at least a month after the event," said Simon Rego, director, of psychology training at Montefiore Medical Center/[Albert Einstein](#) College of Medicine in New York City.

"I'd expect many people to display symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder even if they did not directly experience effects of Sandy," he added. That's particularly true for people who had a loved one in danger or even just watched it on television, he said.

"This includes symptoms of anxiety, such as irritability, insomnia, [restlessness](#), and dissociation such as feeling numb or detached from others, or feeling as if in a daze," Rego said.

In addition, "re-experiencing" symptoms, such as flashbacks and intrusive images, might occur for some who were closest to the destruction. Others may display symptoms of avoidance—trying to avoid thinking or talking about the hurricane and avoiding certain people or places that remind them of the events.

Still, many of these effects are transient. "Fortunately, people are quite resilient and for many of these people, the symptoms will begin to abate on their own over time, as long as they have a healthy support system that enables them to talk about what happened and how they feel about it and do their best to return to as close to as normal routine as they can manage, under the circumstances," Rego said.

Sara Rivero-Conil, a child psychologist at Children's Hospital of Miami, also stressed that "events such as Sandy can be traumatic for children."

For youngsters directly affected by the storm, reassurance from parents is crucial, she said. "Tell them they needn't worry, there is a plan in place and these events don't happen every day," Rivero-Conil said.

Children are also very sensitive to their parents' behavior, she added, and if parent is anxious or depressed kids will feel that tension and become anxious, too, she said.

"Parents are their children's heroes," she said, so it is important that parents try to keep a positive attitude and reassure their children.

Even for children who didn't experience the storm directly, seeing images on the TV can be disturbing. "Parents shouldn't let their children watch TV coverage of the storm," she said. Moms and dads should also stress that events such as Sandy are rare, and not every storm should be a source of fear.

**More information:** For more information on stress reactions, visit the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

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