

# 'Pandemic fatigue' setting in? Here's how to stay safe and strong

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The COVID-19 pandemic may feel like it's been going on forever, but

it's important to keep up safety measures, a mental health expert says.

Dr. Olusunmi Bamgbose, a psychiatrist at Cedars-Sinai in Southern California—an area that's facing an unprecedented surge in coronavirus cases—offered some tips for keeping up with pandemic safeguards and some theories about why people may be backsliding into unsafe behaviors.

"People definitely have pandemic fatigue," said Bamgbose, who is on the Cedars-Sinai Reproductive Psychology team. "I think people miss their families and miss doing what they want to do. I think they want their life to feel normal again, so they're looking for ways to go and do that."

Among the reasons people are making riskier choices is [peer pressure](#), Bamgbose said.

"You might be faced with people around you who are pressuring you to push your boundaries, like a mother who wants you to come over for a holiday dinner where several people are coming over and getting together inside," Bamgbose said. "It can be very difficult to stick to your guns and say, "I don't feel comfortable doing that.""

Confirmation bias also plays a role. If a person engages in risky behavior and doesn't get COVID-19, or gets the virus and has a mild case, they're more likely to do the same behavior again, she explained in a medical center news release.

New restrictions, including in places like Southern California as case numbers have grown, may also be confusing and can cause frustration.

"It can be hard for people to understand the medical decision-making that goes into these guidelines," Bamgbose said. "It's hard to reconcile the current restrictions—for example, the fact that outdoor dining at

restaurants is now prohibited—with those we had in the not-so-distant past, just a week or two ago."

Age can also be an issue, she noted, both because the frontal lobe of the brain, which controls judgment, doesn't fully develop until about age 25 and because [younger people](#) may feel invincible because they are generally at lower risk of severe disease or death.

Assess your personal risks and decide where your boundaries are, Bamgbose suggested. Reasons for following [safety measures](#) might include that you don't want to get yourself or your family sick, or that you also don't want to sicken someone you may not even know. Then try to connect with a community of like-minded people to keep yourself in a "good-behavior echo chamber," she said.

"Try to remember why we're doing this," Bamgbose said. "Even if you don't get sick, if the hospitals are overloaded, think about the health system as a whole, and the consequences if the virus is spread."

Bamgbose recommends finding ways to safely connect with loved ones until the pandemic is over.

Though that would primarily mean connecting via phone or [video chat](#), if you do see someone in person, "make sure you are chatting from across the yard, at a safe physical distance, and with masks on," Bamgbose said.

"When you see a loved one, even from a distance, it can be easy to let your guard down. So set a time limit and stick to it," she advised.

"I recognize that sometimes we do need to make a connection," she said. "It's about making sure we're able to feel that in the safest way possible."

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has tips on [protecting yourself and others from COVID-19](#).

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