

Vivid 'pandemic dreams' and nightmares keep nation awake during coronavirus outbreak

8 April 2020, by Mark Price



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Something called "pandemic dreams" is being blamed for keeping stressed out Americans up at night during the coronavirus outbreak.

These dreams are described as vivid, weird and occasionally horrifying on Twitter, where examples are being shared via #pandemicdreams.

Many involve [fear of death](#), threats against loved ones and the anxiety associated with venturing out into an unfamiliar world of empty streets, closed stores and potentially infected people.

"In my dream, I called an Uber, but a hearse showed up instead. Not liking these #pandemicdreams," Sarah Schachner posted March 23 on Twitter.

"Last night I dreamed both my daughters again were children & locked in hotel room in a skyscraper by someone who wished them harm. In terror I snuck them out of there and I set them up in a secret tent in a little green park near the sea," Dr. Elizabeth Sawin said in a March 11 Tweet.

"I had a dream that I went grocery shopping, and the only thing I could find was a stick of butter. When I got out of the store, it fell out of my bag, and a lady stepped on it with a stiletto heel. Analyze that one!" tweeted Lisa Devlin.

Health experts say these strange dreams are not surprising. Sleeplessness and changes in [sleep patterns](#) are part of how understandably frightened Americans are reacting during the pandemic, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people," the CDC says. "Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children."

The coronavirus has infected nearly 1.4 million people and killed nearly 77,000, including 11,000 in the United States, according to the latest data from Johns Hopkins University from April 7.

As a result, stay-at-home orders are forcing millions to stay isolated for weeks, store shelves are empty due to hoarding and jobs are laying people off due to lack of customers.

"The coronavirus pandemic has upended nearly every aspect of our waking lives—our routines, our job security, our hopes for the future," The Cut reported in an April 2 story on pandemic dreams. "And our nights are changing, too: our sleep can be fitful, our dreams darker—and, for many, unusually memorable."

This is worrisome to [health experts](#) because [lack of sleep](#) makes us more vulnerable to illnesses, including the coronavirus.

"Scientific evidence is building that sleep has powerful effects on immune functioning," according to a CDC report. "Studies show that [sleep loss](#) can affect different parts of the immune system, which can lead to the development of a wide variety of disorders. ... Sleep loss is also related to a higher risk for infection."

The Sleep Foundation has issued some guidelines to help people sleep during the COVID-19 outbreak:

- Be specific about sleep. Set a wind-down time before bed, a sleep time and a wake up time. The wind-down time can include "light reading, stretching, and meditating along with preparations for bed like putting on pajamas and brushing your teeth."
- Incorporate routines to provide time cues during the day, including showering and dressing, even if you aren't going out.
- Reserve the bed for sleep, and try to make it up daily so you are not tempted to lounge on it.
- If you can't get to sleep, "get out of bed and do something relaxing in very low light, and then head back to bed to try to fall asleep."

Don't use electronic devices in bed or immediately before going to bed. "The [blue light](#) produced by [electronic devices](#), such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers, has been found to interfere with the body's natural sleep-promoting processes," the Sleep Foundation says.

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APA citation: Vivid 'pandemic dreams' and nightmares keep nation awake during coronavirus outbreak (2020, April 8) retrieved 12 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-vivid-pandemic-nightmares-nation-coronavirus.html>

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