

## Coping with the Stress of Waiting for COVID-19 Test Results – Air Force Survey

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**Background:** Waiting for the results of the COVID-19 test forces upon a person the realization that they may be ill and die as a result. This kind of thought is usually absent from daily life. The uncertainty involved with waiting for the COVID-19 test results usually causes concern, which in some people may result in significant anxiety. The purpose of the present survey was to examine the level of emotional distress among Air Force members waiting for the COVID-19 test results.

**Method:** The source of the data used in this survey was the Aero-Medical COVID-19 center's database. Participation in the survey was on volunteer basis. Each participant received an online questionnaire that included questions on the following topics: type of isolation prior to being tested (i.e. home, in the military unit, in a military inpatient facility and a group tested for silent carriers of the virus), COVID-19 clarification status (i.e. awaiting testing, tested, etc.), self-evaluation health questionnaire, level of mental distress, and fear category. In addition, the survey included the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) questionnaire.

**Results:** The survey included 284 participants, 62% (176) of whom were male and 42% (119) were career soldiers. The age range was 18.0 – 50.0 years ( $m=24.3$ ;  $SD 7.61$ ). Regarding testing, 45.8% (130) of the participants had been tested already and were found negative for Covid 19. More than 50% were still waiting for testing or for test results. The degree of distress of the group that was isolated at home was high compared to the group isolated in the military medical facility. However, the highest level of distress was observed in a group that was not isolated (a group tested for silent carriers of the virus). The level of distress and anxiety among women was higher compared to men. The level of distress was also found to be higher among soldiers in compulsory service than among career soldiers and among the enlisted soldiers compared to officers. Finally, administrators and technical officers demonstrated higher levels of anxiety and distress compared to the combat soldiers.

**Discussion and Conclusions:** The findings indicate that the isolation environment provided in the military facility seems to have had a beneficial effect on the soldiers' mental state, as compared to home isolation. This surprising effect may be due to the fact that isolation at a military facility removes the fear of infecting one's family members. If there will be a second wave the benefits of home isolation should be considered. The high level of distress found among women and compulsory service soldiers is supported by the latest research findings in Israel and around the world. The combination of a number of stressors like military job, marital and financial status, etc., may increase the likelihood of distress. These populations should, therefore, be monitored proactively by medical and mental health professionals while awaiting test results. ●

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**Keywords:** COVID-19; Mental health officers; Military; Stress.