

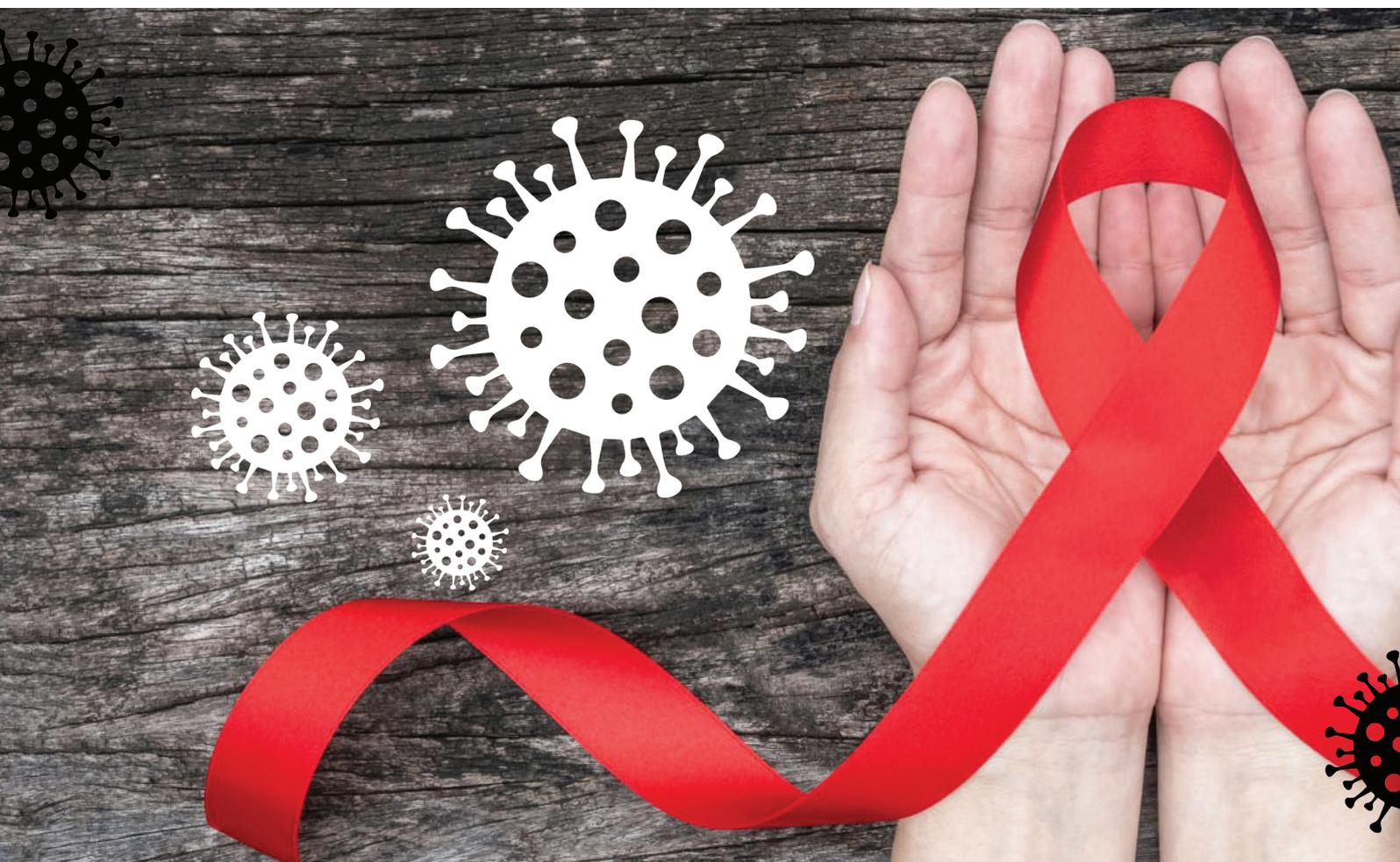


COVID-19 & HIV

This info-sheet is a compilation of information to provide more understanding on COVID-19. This also contains what you need to know about COVID-19, HIV and risks for PLHIV.

**Updated December 2021*

We will get through this pandemic. It will take time and patience. We will need to support each other just as gay men and other men who have sex with men have had to support each other against stigma and discrimination. Our collective response to COVID-19 will make us stronger.



WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause primarily respiratory illnesses ranging from the common cold to life-threatening pneumonia. COVID-19 disease is caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. This coronavirus has not been seen before. People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported, ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus, but most commonly after 5 days.

As our understanding of COVID-19 develops over time, and as new versions or variants of the virus emerge, some of the advice about COVID-19 will change. As recommendations are updated based on new evidence, we all need to revise our behaviours, too.

HOW IS COVID-19 SPREAD

COVID-19 spreads by exhaled aerosol, infected saliva, mucus or respiratory droplets being breathed out by someone with the virus and then being inhaled or entering the eyes, nose or mouth of another person. Without taking precautions, every person with the Delta strain of COVID-19 can infect another 6 – 8 people.

This happens in three main ways:

- Breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling aerosols, small droplets and particles containing the virus.
- Droplets and particles that contain virus landing on the eyes, nose, or mouth, especially through a cough or sneeze.
- Touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them (after touching a surface where droplets or particles with the virus have landed, for example).

Keeping some distance from others helps to reduce the chance of COVID-19 spread, but there are some circumstances where the spread of COVID-19 is more likely, even if you are staying more than 1.5 metres apart.

The three main situations are:

- Enclosed spaces, without enough fresh air coming in from outside (or from a HEPA filter), where droplets and particles can build up over time
- Heavy breathing among people inside a space, such as when singing, shouting, exercising or during sex
- Prolonged exposure, typically of more than 15 minutes, particularly in the above situations

THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 ARE LIKE A COLD OR THE FLU

Typical symptoms are:

Fever

high body temperature

Dry cough

Fatigue

tired and not wanting to do anything much

Vomiting or diarrhoea

Loss of taste and/or smell

Nasal congestion
blocked nose, difficult to breathe through nose

Sore throat

Headache aches and pains all over your body

Seek emergency attention if:

Shortness of breath
difficulty breathing

Persistent pain or pressure in your chest

Loss of appetite

Confusion Dizziness and/or fainting

As well as the short term symptoms, some people who have had COVID-19 will experience long term symptoms such as persistent fatigue.



From the information available globally, PLHIV are more likely, on average, to get severe illness after being infected with COVID-19. It is important that PLHIV who are on treatment continue to take their ART regularly to suppress the HIV virus.

When PLHIV are affected by other health issues like heart or lung disease or diabetes, are not on ART, or have advanced HIV disease (a low CD4+ T cell count – generally less than 200/mm³), or are older, there may be a higher risk for getting sicker from COVID-19.

SHOULD PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV GET VACCINATED?

Vaccination will help protect PLHIV from severe illness if they are infected by COVID-19. It is important that PLHIV are given opportunities to get vaccinated early, particularly those who are not well or have recently been diagnosed, have other health issues (like those above) or have a weaker immune system. Vaccination does not affect ART or any other treatments.

Despite limited data, vaccination is considered safe and effective for all PLHIV. Because PLHIV are likely to be at increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness, it is more important that PLHIV are vaccinated as soon as possible. There is some evidence that PLHIV should be offered a third dose of the vaccination to help their bodies build a strong enough immune response to COVID-19, but studies are ongoing.

WHO recommend that Astrazeneca, Johnson and Johnson, Moderan, Pfizer, Sinopharm and Sinova COVID-19 vaccines are all safe for PLHIV. Therefore, PLHIV should be vaccinated using whichever vaccine is available to them.

I AM A PLHIV. HOW CAN I ENSURE MY CONTINUED ACCESS TO TREATMENT?

People living with HIV - it is important at this time to take extra precautions to protect yourself, your health and the health of your loved ones - **BE PREPARED**

- If you are on antiretroviral treatment for your HIV, then try to get more than a month's supply
(many hospitals and clinics will now provide 3-6 months of drug supply)
- If you take ARV and/or methadone/buprenorphine, ask your clinic or doctor for longer take-home doses and also work with them to make a plan to prevent disruptions to your dose.
- Determine if your doctor or clinic can do consultations over the phone so that you don't have to attend in person
- Make sure you have a support network in case you are confined to your home - they can do your shopping, restock your masks and hand gel
- Consider contacting your local network of people living with HIV and/or your local MSM organization - they can be a resource and a support
- Talk to your doctor or local support networks about having your antiretroviral treatment delivered to your home, if possible



COVID-19 DOs (HOW TO PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS?)

Stay safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds, cleaning your hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue.

Check local advice where you live and work. Do it all!

- Wear a mask when in public spaces and public transportation
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces
- If the mask is disposable, then discard when finished wearing. Cut off the ears straps in case the mask ends up in the environment and puts wildlife at risk of entanglement.
- Wash your hands frequently and immediately after touching something you are concerned about e.g. a door handle. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- AVOID touching your face, including eyes, nose and mouth particularly.
- Cover your face when you cough or sneeze
- Keep your distance from others outside of your home - two (2) meters
- Consider taking another bus or train if yours is overcrowded
- If you are sick then stay home and keep away from other people

As the COVID-19 virus is spread from person-to-person contact by droplets such as saliva or mucus, the safest sex during the outbreak is to limit sexual activity.

- The next safest partner is someone you live with. Having close contact – including sex – with only a small circle of people helps prevent spreading COVID-19.
- You should limit close contact – including sex – with anyone outside your household. If you do have sex with others outside of your household, have as few partners as possible and pick partners you trust to be honest with you about their risk of exposure to COVID-19
- If having sex with someone outside your household, try to do so in well ventilated spaces, use positions that reduce face-to-face contact, and consider not kissing and wearing masks – be creative and make it kinky
- Try virtual sex with a sex buddy, like sexting or video calls
- People who are fully vaccinated (at least two weeks have passed since they got a single-dose vaccine or the second dose of a two-dose vaccine) can more safely go on dates, make out and have sex
- Even if you are fully vaccinated, get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or were recently exposed to someone with COVID-19. If you test positive to COVID-19, avoid having sex and close contact with others until your isolation period ends.



HOW CAN PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS REDUCE RISK OF GETTING COVID-19?

- Minimise the need to share your supplies. If you need to share, practice harm reduction with your supplies by wiping with alcohol swab or use separate mouthpieces;
- Prepare the drugs yourself. Wash your hands with water and soap, and keep your surfaces clean, before preparing;
- For other safe drug use and harm reduction practices, you may visit harmreduction.org

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- World Health Organization
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub>
- Sexual health and/or HIV clinics
- Selected community-based clinics / organizations
- Your doctor or local hospital
- Contact APCOM for advice and recommendations

Resources:

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). World Health Organization, October 2020.
Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/>

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COVID-19 and HIV. What people living with HIV need to know about HIV and COVID-19. UNAIDS (undated).
Available At: <https://www.unaids.org/en/covid19>

Safer Sex and COVID-19. NYC Health, October 2021.
Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-sex-guidance.pdf>

COVID-19 Effect Series. APCOM 2020.
Available at: www.apcom.org

How to "Wai" properly in Thailand. Kelly Iverson, December 2017. Culture Trip.
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Sex and Coronavirus (COVID-19). Avert, September 2020.
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<https://harmreduction.org/blog/covid-19-guidance-for-people-who-use-drugs-and-harm-reduction-programs/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/index.html>

<https://www.gnppplus.net>

<https://www.preventionaccess.org>

<https://www.iasociety.org/covid-19-hiv>

<https://www.unaids.org/en/covid19>

<https://www.nat.org.uk/hiv-covid19>

<https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/covid-19>

