

COVID-19 & HIV RESOURCE GUIDE

INCLUDES INFORMATION ON

Basics of COVID-19

Suggestions from Providers

If You Get Sick

Getting Vaccinated

Safe Sex During COVID-19

Community Resources



MIDWEST AIDS TRAINING AND EDUCATION CENTER



This tool was developed as an interactive PDF. This document was made to be an interactive resource guide with links to up-to-date, credible information that provides additional information and resources in addition to what is covered by the written content itself. This is a resource designed to provide current information, guidance, and community resources to people with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic. This resource is not meant to be a substitute for care and is in no way intended to be used as sole guidance.

This document will be updated but for the most up to date information look at reputable sources like the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) or your local health department.

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Please email mnmatec@gmail.com with any questions or concerns about this document.

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Basics of COVID-19

COVID-19 (SARS Cov-2) is a virus that is mainly spread through close contact with other people. Infections occur mainly through exposure to respiratory droplets when a person is in close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Respiratory droplets are produced when people cough, sneeze, sing, talk, or breathe.

People with COVID-19 may experience a wide range of symptoms ranging from mild to severe. These symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion of runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Not every person with COVID-19 has symptoms; people who have COVID-19 but do not show symptoms can still spread COVID-19 to others. The best way to prevent illness and reduce the spread of COVID-19 is to take precautionary measures such as:

- Getting vaccinated
- Following physical distancing measures by staying 6 feet apart from others and wearing a face covering or mask
- Avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces
- Washing your hands often with soap and water



IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS SHOWING OF THE FOLLOWING WARNING SIGNS, SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New Confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility and notify them that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.

Long-Term Effects

COVID-19 is a new illness, and data is continuously being collected to provide the most up-to-date information. [New information about long term effects of COVID-19, and post-COVID conditions](#) are continuously being analyzed and updated.



Post-COVID conditions refer to health issues that persist more than four weeks after first being infected with COVID-19. Post-COVID conditions include: long COVID, multiorgan effects of COVID-19, and the effects of COVID-19 treatment or hospitalization.

Long COVID can last weeks or months after being infected with COVID-19 or can appear weeks after infection. Long COVID-19 can affect anyone who has had COVID-19. People with long COVID have experienced different combinations of the following symptoms:

- Tiredness or fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fast-beating or pounding heart
- Chest Pain
- Cough
- Depression or anxiety
- Difficulty thinking and/or concentrating
- Headache
- Loss of taste or smell
- Dizziness on standing
- Joint or muscle pain
- Fever

Symptoms may get worse after physical or mental activities. Many people with symptoms get better over time. However, there are many ways to help manage post-COVID conditions. If you think you have a post-COVID condition, talk to your healthcare provider about options for managing or treating your symptoms and resources for support.

Who is at High Risk for Severe Illness with COVID-19?

Severe illness means that a person with COVID-19 may require hospitalization, intensive care, and/or a ventilator to help them breathe. People with severe illness with COVID-19 may be at increased risk of death.

People with HIV who are on effective HIV treatment with a normal CD4 T-cell count are not thought to be at an increased risk of serious illness, however many people living with HIV may have other conditions that may increase their risk for severe illness.

People who are at higher risk of severe illness are:

- **Older Adults:** Risk of severe illness with COVID-19 increases with age. Older adults are at greater risk of requiring hospitalization or dying if they are diagnosed with COVID-19.
- **Pregnant People:** Pregnant people are at an increased risk of COVID-19 when compared to non-pregnant people.
- **People with Certain Medical Conditions:** This includes but is not limited to chronic lung disease (including moderate to severe asthma), smoking, severe heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes, sickle cell disease, obesity (BMI >30), chronic kidney disease, liver disease, and cancer.
- **People Who Are Immunocompromised:** Many conditions and treatments can cause a person to be immunocompromised or have a weakened immune system. This includes people with [HIV who have a low CD4 count or are not on effective HIV treatment.](#)



If You Are Feeling Sick

If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and [symptoms such as a](#) cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell:

- Stay home and [follow CDC advice](#)
- Call your healthcare provider or a triage nurse for medical advice. They can advise you on whether you need to seek in-person medical care. Let them know your symptoms and tell them you may have COVID-19. This will help them take care of you and keep other people from getting infected or exposed.
- If you are advised to go in to seek medical care, avoid public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis if possible



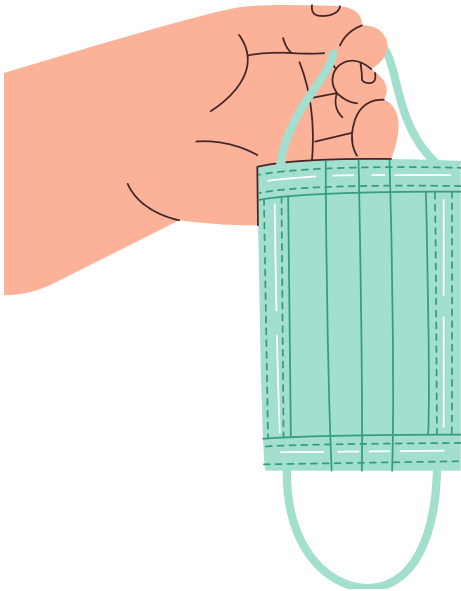
Many people with COVID-19 are not sick enough to be hospitalized and can recover at home; discuss with your medical team and follow their recommendations.

Get medical attention immediately if you have any of the emergency warning signs listed below:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New Confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

General COVID-19 Guidance for People with HIV

People with HIV should continue to follow CDC recommendations and practice physical distancing, wearing masks consistently, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and [washing your hands regularly](#).



People with HIV should get [vaccinated for COVID-19](#), regardless of CD4 cell count or viral load. The vaccine is most effective for people on ART with a suppressed viral load.

People with HIV with a low CD4 cell count or not on treatment appear to be at more risk for severe illness with COVID-19 and should be prioritized for vaccinations. It is recommended that people with HIV who are not on treatment start treatment without delay.

Make sure vaccinations are up to date including the influenza and pneumococcal vaccines to avoid vaccine preventable diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major effect on our lives and many people are experiencing increased stress. Maintain a social network and stay in touch with others by telephone, email, or other remote technology. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you get sick; and maintaining a social network can also help to keep spirits up during the pandemic.

The pandemic may also exacerbate mental health and substance use concerns; more information can be found pages 10 and 12.



Suggestions from HIV Providers

These recommendations are not intended to replace professional medical advice, but rather to be a helpful resource during this challenging time. Contact your healthcare provider for specific medical advice.

Clinical Visits

At this time in the pandemic healthcare centers are very good at preventing transmission of COVID-19 in the medical setting and many providers in the Midwest are seeing patients in person and recommending coming into clinics for visits and labs.

Telehealth is an alternative for routine or non-urgent medical care and can replace in clinic visits but it is important to stay up to date on labs and preventative care visits.

Some providers have implemented both telehealth and in-person visits for stable HIV patients. Your clinic should determine if in person or telehealth care is required or recommended. Call your clinic's triage nurse if you're in doubt about your need to come to the clinic.

Medications

It is recommended to ensure you have a 30-day to 90-day supply of each medication you take.

If you are living with HIV but not on medication, contact your provider or the [MN AIDSLine](#) (612-373-2437) to determine the best plan for you to move forward. If you are living with HIV that is not controlled or are newly on medication without a documented suppressed viral load, call your provider to schedule a lab appointment.



Staying Healthy

Take [physical distancing](#) seriously. Stay home as much as possible and limit gatherings with people outside your household. Continue to work from home. If your employer requires a note, ask your healthcare provider. If you are not able to work from home, practice physical distancing at work (stay at least 6 feet apart).

Maintain a healthy lifestyle; staying healthy will help your immune system fight off infection should it occur. Try to eat right, get at least 8 hours of sleep, exercise, reduce smoking/vaping, limit alcohol consumption, monitor your blood sugar if you are diabetic, take medications as prescribed, and take care of your mental health. Reach out for support when needed. Contact your provider if you are struggling during the pandemic.



COVID-19 Testing

Testing is an important effort in reducing the spread of COVID-19. It is important to get tested for COVID-19 if you:

- Have symptoms of COVID-19
- Have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- Have taken part in high risk activities such as travel or attending large gatherings
- Are returning to a classroom or campus
- Are actively engaged with people outside of your household or are working at a place that has remained open during the pandemic



To get a test you can go to a clinic or hospital, or you can visit [a no-barrier community testing site run by the State of Minnesota](#). You can also utilize Minnesota's [no cost test at home program](#). You can find a test using Minnesota's ["Find a Testing Location"](#) tool.

Minnesota's community testing sites are available at no-cost. Hospitals and clinics may have different pay structures; contact both the testing site and your health insurance company ahead of your visit to ensure you won't be charged for a test. You can [apply to get free COVID-19 testing](#) at a clinic or hospital if you do not have insurance.

IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS, YOU NEED TO ISOLATE:

- Stay home when you are sick, whether you seek out testing or not. If you leave your home to get a test, avoid public transportation if possible, wear a mask and stay six feet away from other people. The [COVID test at home program](#) may be the best option for you.
- If you have moderate to severe symptoms, do not visit a COVID-19 Community Testing Site. Call your healthcare provider or a triage nurse to get medical advice.
- If you have severe symptoms call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility and notify them that you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19

COVID-19 Vaccines

The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that [all vaccines are as safe as possible](#). The COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved for emergency use have gone through the same safety testing procedures and meet the same standards as other vaccines.

It is recommended that all people with HIV get the COVID-19 vaccine. People with HIV are considered to be in the priority risk group for getting the vaccine. You can find your vaccine using the ["Find Your Vaccine"](#) tool.

As this is a rapidly evolving rollout you can stay updated on your eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine and connect to vaccine opportunities in your area when they become available by signing up for the [Minnesota Vaccine Connector](#).



COVID-19 vaccines are effective at protecting you from getting sick. However, we are still learning how vaccines will effect the spread of COVID-19 and how long COVID-19 vaccines can protect people.

Once you are fully vaccinated you can start to resume [some aspects](#) of pre-pandemic life. You should keep taking [precautions](#) once you are fully vaccinated like wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart from others and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.

WHEN ARE YOU [FULLY VACCINATED](#)?

- 2 weeks after your second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson vaccine

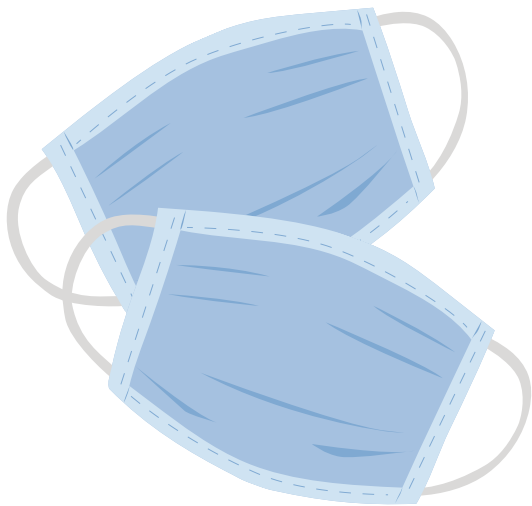
Masking Guidance

It is important to wear a face mask to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Masks work best when everyone wears one. Masks should be worn:

- Any time you are in a public setting
- Any time you are traveling on public transportation
- Inside your home if someone you live with is sick with symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19
- When you are around people who do not live with you, including inside your home or inside someone else's home



Masks are an additional step to help prevent people from getting and spreading COVID-19 and should be used in combination with physical distancing.



There are a variety of different types of masks including cloth masks, medical procedure masks, and KN95 masks. [The CDC has information on picking a mask and how to improve mask fit.](#)

When [choosing a mask](#), you should pick a mask that fits properly on your face (snugly around the nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face), masks made with breathable fabric and has two to three layers.

Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on our [mental health](#). Combined with factors like unemployment, remote working/learning, lack of social contact and other pandemic related anxieties, it can be difficult to cope with day to day life. These stressors can be particularly difficult for people with mental health conditions.

Considering the extra challenges we are facing during the pandemic it is important for you to look after your mental health and wellbeing, and seek support when needed.

There are steps that can be taken to help [reduce and cope with stress](#) during the pandemic, including:

- Stay connected to others
- Take care of your body
- Make time to unwind
- Limit social media use

Some things may be easier than others to do; try your best and reach out to your healthcare

provider if stress is getting in the way of performing daily activities. You can find a [behavioral health provider/program via SAMHSA](#).

GRIEF AND LOSS

Many people are experiencing feelings of grief during the pandemic, as well as experiencing multiple losses. People cope with grief and loss in different ways and it is important to reach out for support when needed. The CDC has compiled [resources and guidance](#) for people dealing with grief and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic.

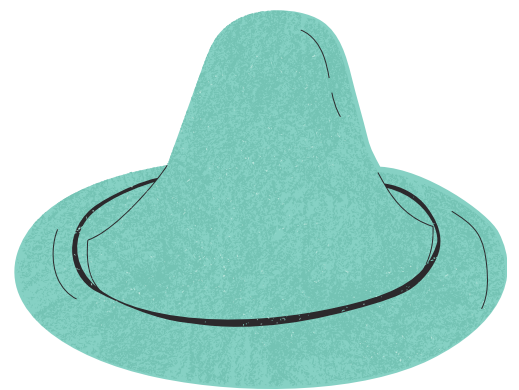
During times of extreme stress, people may have thoughts of suicide. Suicide is preventable and help is available. The CDC has more [information and resources](#) about the risks of suicide, signs to watch for, and how to respond to potential warning signs.

Safe Sex During COVID-19

Decisions about sex during the pandemic should be balanced with personal and public health; consider utilizing harm reduction strategies to minimize risk for yourself and others.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you are your safest sex partner. The next safest person to have sex with is someone who you live with. If you are having sex with someone who you don't live with, [there are several things you can do to lower the risk of spreading or getting COVID-19:](#)

- **Avoid kissing** anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts. Kissing can easily pass the virus
- **Use condoms and/or dental dams.** Not only do condoms and dental dams help protect you from HIV and STIs but they can also reduce contact with saliva, semen, and feces during oral and anal sex which can help protect you from COVID-19
- **Get tested for COVID-19 regularly.**
- **Wash up before and after sex.** Washing your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water and make sure you wash shared sex toys
- **Wear a mask.** A face covering that covers your nose and mouth is a good way to add a layer of protection during sex
- **Mutually masturbate.** Physically distance, at least 6 feet, and wear a face mask to reduce the risk
- **Virtual Sex.** Consider taking a break from in-person dates and try video calls, sexting or phone sex



If you or your partner are showing symptoms for COVID-19 you should avoid close physical contact including kissing, cuddling, oral, anal, or vaginal sex. You may also want to skip sex if you or your partner(s) have a medical condition that can lead to severe COVID-19 illness.



Using Substances During COVID-19

Some of the tips below may seem impossible depending on your current situation. Do the best you can and reach out to friends, harm reduction and syringe service providers, and other health or social service providers to plan for ways to keep yourself safe.



Do not share smoking or snorting equipment (cookers, pipes, bongs). If you absolutely must share, be sure to clean them with an alcohol swab. Your local syringe service program can provide you with safe use supplies. You can find [a local syringe service through NASEN](#) and [locate naloxone and syringes via the Harm Reduction Coalition](#).

Keep your circle small and limit contact with others. **Do not use alone and carry naloxone.** If you have to use alone, download [Be Safe](#), an overdose prevention app, or call (800) 484-3731 to access the [Never Use Alone](#) hotline.

The [Harm Reduction Coalition](#) recommends:

- **Minimize the need to share your supplies**
- **Minimize contact.** COVID-19 can be transmitted by close contact like coughing, kissing, or direct contact with bodily fluids. If you are having sex or [doing sex work](#), try to minimize close contact and ensure condom use
- **Prepare your drugs yourself and keep your space clean**
- **Plan and prepare for an overdose.** Load up on naloxone and fentanyl testing strips; visit [NextDistro](#) for naloxone by mail
- **Stock up on supplies and prepare for drug shortages**
- **Ensure you have supplies to aid you in the event of a withdrawal.**
You may lose access to your drug of choice during an outbreak. Consider alternative drugs or medications (ibuprofen, Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, buprenorphine, etc.)
- **Connect with your local SSP or provider for buprenorphine or methadone**

Resources

National

[Financial Assistance with Food Housing and Bills During COVID-19](#): A compiled list from the U.S. government with links to further assistance

[Food Resources During COVID-19 \(CDC\)](#): The CDC has compiled the following resources for individuals and families seeking food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic

Local

[AIDSLINE](#): The Minnesota AIDSLine is Minnesota's statewide information and referral service that can answer your questions about HIV and link you to help including food services, housing, transportation, health insurance, and medical case management

[Harm Reduction Sisters](#): Harm Reduction Sisters offer syringe access services including the distribution of safe injection supplies, naloxone, and overdose education in Duluth surrounding areas. Harm Reduction Sisters also has compiled a [comprehensive collection of resources](#) including harm reduction literature, wellness tips, and local resource guides

[HIV/AIDS Community Services Directory \(Rainbow Health, f.k.a. JustUs Health\)](#): This page has information on how HIV/AIDS organizations affected by the Novel Coronavirus. There may be a lag of time between when information about services change and when the information on this page is updated

[Rent Help MN](#): This program was created to provide assistance to [eligible Minnesota renters](#) for rent and utility bills dated on or after March 13, 2020

[Rural AIDS Action Network](#): The Rural AIDS Action Network provides a variety of services in rural Minnesota including HIV and HCV testing, clean injecting supplies, and disposal services

[Southside Harm Reduction](#): Southside Harm Reduction provide a variety of services for people who use drugs in South Minneapolis including naloxone, clean syringe and works delivery, street outreach and skill shares