

# COVID-19 INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV IN IOWA

The purpose of this resource is to answer questions about your health care and how to take care of your health. This is a rapidly evolving situation. This resource will be updated frequently, but we recommend checking reputable sources like the [State of Iowa's COVID-19 Information Page](#), [Iowa Department of Public Health](#), and the [CDC](#) for the most up to date information.

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person. People who are infected but do not show symptoms can spread the virus to others; the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Continue to [practice social distancing](#) and [wash your hands often](#). If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Many but not all people with HIV have additional conditions that increase their risk for severe COVID-19. These may include:

- **Older age** - half of people living with HIV in Iowa are over 50 years of age
- **People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility**
- **Chronic underlying medical conditions** - including but 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; for more information [click here](#).
- **Low-functioning immune system** - occurs when someone has a low CD4 T-cell count, is not receiving antiretroviral treatment, or is not taking HIV medications daily

## IF YOU ARE HIGHER RISK FOR ILLNESS FROM COVID-19

If you have **one or more of the above risk factors**, follow the steps below:

- Work to become virally suppressed if you are not already, including seeking medical care if you are not currently engaged with an HIV care provider. Call a provider to determine the best plan for you
- Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra medications to have on hand in case there is a COVID-19 outbreak in your community requiring you to stay home for a prolonged period of time
- Continue taking recommended medicines and continue getting your labs drawn; closely follow the guidance of your health care provider
- Ensure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms if you contract COVID-19.
- Continue to [stay at home](#) and reduce physical contact with others; [practice social distancing](#) when you go out and wear a mask in public spaces
- Eat right, try to get at least 8 hours of sleep, and reduce stress as much as possible to keep your immune system healthy

## SUGGESTIONS FROM LOCAL HIV PROVIDERS IN IOWA AND THE MIDWEST\*

- Take **physical distancing** seriously
- **Providers are encouraging all patients to get the COVID-19 vaccine when eligible.** If you have questions or concerns about the vaccine talk to your healthcare provider to receive supplemental information

- It is highly encouraged that you attend your appointments as you did pre pandemic. Many healthcare facilities are offering both telehealth and in person options for clinic visits.
- Continue to work from home, if possible. If your employer requires a note, ask your provider. If you are not able to work from home, practice social distancing at work (stay at least 6 feet apart) and avoid people with a cough
- If you are living with HIV but not on medication, reach out and call a provider to determine the best plan for you to move forward
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle; staying healthy will help your immune system fight off infection should it occur. Reduce smoking/vaping, limit alcohol consumption, monitor your blood sugar if you are diabetic, take medications for high blood pressure as prescribed, take care of your mental health, etc.

\*These recommendations are not intended to replace professional medical advice, but rather to be a helpful resource for you during this challenging time

## IF YOU ARE FEELING SICK

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

1. Stay home and [follow CDC advice](#)
2. Call your healthcare provider for medical advice. 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
3. 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 or inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face

## PLANNING FOR IF YOU GET SICK

- [Maintain a social network](#); 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 will also keep spirits up while isolated or quarantined
- Determine who can care for you if your caregiver gets sick
- Establish plan for clinical care if isolated/quarantined, including [telemedicine options](#) and online health portals such as "MyChart"
- Ensure ample medication supply: 30-day supply, and ideally a 90 day supply, at all times for each medication you take
- Make sure vaccinations are up to date including the influenza and pneumococcal vaccines to avoid vaccine preventable diseases

## GETTING VACCINATED FOR COVID-19

Iowa providers are encouraging people to [sign up to be notified about vaccination availability through MyChart](#). Reach out to your local pharmacy to learn more about vaccination efforts in your community.

- You can find a provider by visiting [Vaccine Providers](#)

- As this is a rapidly evolving rollout and situation; you can learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination rollout from the [Iowa Department of Public Health](#)
- There is misinformation circulating about the vaccine, look to the CDC for [the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines](#)

## GETTING TESTED

The State of Iowa has [developed an assessment](#) to determine individual's current risk and to help prioritize testing. You must fill out the assessment to receive a COVID-19 test. **Testing is prioritized for people who:**

- Currently have symptoms
- Have interacted with someone who has already tested positive for COVID-19
- Have recently visited places where COVID-19 is more widespread

The CARES Act requires that COVID-19 testing is free; this applies to the test only. For more information about testing in Iowa, including where testing sites are located, visit [Test Iowa](#). Information is available in both English and Spanish. You can also visit [the State of Iowa's FAQs on testing](#).

## MASKING GUIDANCE

Masking is an important measure to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. [The CDC recommends that masks:](#)

- Should have two or more layers of washable, tightly woven, breathable material
- Must cover cover your mouth and nose, and should not have an exhalation valve or vent
- Should fit snugly on the face and have no gaps

## IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV

- [COVID-19: What People With HIV Should Know \(CDC\)](#): This page answers a lot of questions about HIV and COVID-19
- [COVID-19 in Iowa FAQ](#): This page has a resources on a variety of topics including mental health, food security, and unemployment
- [UI Health Care COVID-19 Vaccinations](#): UI Health Care is working with community and public health partners to distribute doses to vaccinate those who are eligible. Sign up via [MyChart](#) or via [this web form](#) to express interest in receiving a COVID-19 vaccine
- [COVID-19 Iowa Housing Recovery](#): Iowa Finance Authority has compiled a list of resources related to housing assistance during COVID-19
- [Iowa HIV, STD, & HCV Services Directory](#): This directory includes information on testing locations, client services, and Ryan White Clinical Services. Testing services may be reduced at this time, contact your local testing services for availability
- [Ryan White Care and Support Services](#): This website explains the benefits and services offered through the Ryan White Program, which is available for all Persons Living with HIV in the United States and can help you receive case management, housing, transportation, mental health services, and more. Iowa residents can apply for Ryan White Part B Services with the assistance of case managers
- [PrEP Iowa](#): PrEP Iowa provides information on PrEP in Iowa including finding a provider, telePrEP, getting help with payment and other resources
- [Naloxone Iowa](#): Naloxone Iowa help Iowans who want or need to have naloxone on hand get the tools they need. This program allows for individuals to receive tele-naloxone

- [MylACondoms](#): This website helps lowan's find free condoms near them with their condom locator tool. Please note, due to the COVID-19 situation some sites that supply condoms may be closed or operating under different hours. Please call the site directly if you plan to go there to get condoms
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Reducing Stigma \(CDC\)](#): People with HIV have lived experience in dealing with stigma and can be allies in reducing COVID-19 stigma, this page addresses how to reduce stigma and help prevent the spread of rumors about COVID-19

**Note:** Be wary of misinformation, myths, and false recommendations surrounding COVID-19. Always check the CDC website for accurate guidance.



**MATEC (Midwest AIDS Training & Education Center)**, located at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, provides health care professionals involved in the field of HIV clinical care and management with up-to-date educational opportunities.

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**Contact us:** [mnmatec@gmail.com](mailto:mnmatec@gmail.com)