

COVID-19 INFORMATION FOR PERSONS LIVING 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.

The impact of COVID-19 on people with HIV is not known. Current evidence indicates that the risk of severe illness increases with age and with certain chronic medical problems.

Although people with HIV who are on treatment with a normal CD4 T-cell count are not thought to be at an increased risk of serious illness, many people with HIV have conditions that increase their risk:

- **Older age** - half of people living with HIV in Iowa are over 50 years of age
- **Chronic medical conditions** - chronic lung disease (including moderate to severe asthma), serious heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes, renal failure, liver disease, and cancer are more common in people living with HIV
- **Chronic smokers**
- **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 to move forward
- 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
- Talk to your pharmacist and/or healthcare provider about changing to mail order delivery of medications when possible
- Ensure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms if you contract COVID-19.
- Ensure you have enough household items and groceries on hand so you are prepared to stay home for a prolonged period of time
- Avoid crowds as much as possible
- Avoid cruise travel and non-essential air travel

SUGGESTIONS FROM LOCAL HIV DOCTORS & NURSES IN MIDWEST*

- Take **social distancing** seriously
- **Cancel non-essential appointments at clinics.** If your HIV numbers are stable and you take your medications daily, reschedule your appointments until a later date. Don't take the chance of exposure by going to the clinic; clinics have defined routine HIV follow up and PrEP visits as non-essential and these should be delayed for a few months. Also consider delaying preventive care, such as mammograms and colonoscopies
- Many healthcare facilities are instituting telehealthcare. If you have a medical issue, check to see if telehealth is available. Cold-type symptoms should be assessed through telehealth if possible. If you are having trouble breathing, you should go to the emergency department

- Many providers are OK'ing prescriptions for stable patients without making them come into the clinic for the next few months. You can also communicate the way you usually do with your healthcare providers regarding refills
- Work from home, if possible, for at least a few weeks. 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. If you are living with HIV that is not controlled or are newly on medication without a documented suppressed viral load, call your provider and keep your lab testing follow-up appointments
- Testing for COVID-19 is not readily available, and there is not a lot of information about what the risk for people living with HIV is, so evidence-based recommendations are not available. [Look to the CDC for guidance](#) as this situation is constantly evolving and there have been, and there will continue to be, numerous updates. There is a great deal we do not know yet, so taking the same precautions as are being recommended for the general public is a good idea
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle; staying healthy will help your immune system fight off infection should it occur. Reduce smoking/vaping, monitor your blood sugar if you are diabetic, take medications for high blood pressure as prescribed, 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 such as a **cough** or **shortness of breath**:

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

If you are not sick enough to be hospitalized, you 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 arouse (wake up)
- 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

IF YOU ARE FEELING WELL

Follow these recommended precautionary measures to **prevent COVID-19 Infection:**

- Keep up to date and heed the advice of [Iowa health officials](#) and [the CDC](#); **the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus**
- Continue to take all medications (including your HIV medications) as prescribed, unless directed otherwise by your doctor. Currently there are NOT shortages of HIV medications
- Avoid large gatherings and gatherings in small public places; [wear a cloth face mask](#) in public places where it can be hard to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other people
- Eat right, try to get at least 8 hours of sleep, and reduce stress as much as possible to keep your immune system healthy

IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

- [COVID-19: What People With HIV Should Know \(CDC\)](#): This page answers a lot of questions about HIV and 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.
- [MyIACondoms](#): This website helps Iowans 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.

Sources: <https://www.poz.com/article/people-hiv-need-know-new-coronavirus>
<https://www.thebody.com/health/hiv-coronavirus-covid-19>
<https://www.thebodypro.com/article/covid-19-cdc-recommendations-hiv-clinicians>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/caring-for-yourself-at-home.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>
https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/guidelines/html/8/covid-19-and-persons-with-hiv--interim-guidance-/0?utm_source=AIDSinfo&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=3-20-20-COVID19_Guidance

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SERVING MINNESOTA AND IOWA

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.

Contact us: mnmatec@gmail.com

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