

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) and HIV



## FAST FACTS

- People living with HIV and on effective antiretroviral treatment (ART) are not at greater risk of getting coronavirus.
- Our understanding of the risk of developing severe COVID-19 in people living with HIV is evolving. Current evidence suggests that HIV is less of a risk factor for severe COVID-19 than other health conditions
- People living with HIV not on treatment or virally suppressed may be at a greater risk. Speak to a healthcare professional for more information on how to stay healthy.
- As with the general population, older people living with HIV and those with other underlying health conditions should take extra precautions to prevent illness.
- Try to have at least a 30 days' supply of ART in your home. If possible, ask for three months.
- As more people become infected with coronavirus, we will learn more about how it behaves. Remember to keep in touch with your healthcare provider and advice from your government.

*This page is updated regularly, make sure you come back for the latest information.*

## Is COVID-19 worse in people living with HIV?

There is currently no evidence that people living with HIV are at a higher risk of being infected with coronavirus, the virus that causes COVID-19 illness.

Our understanding of the risk of developing severe COVID-19 in people living with HIV is evolving. Current evidence suggests that HIV is less of a risk factor for severe COVID-19 than other health conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer, diabetes, or being over a certain age.

The best way to stay healthy is by taking your antiretroviral treatment.

We will update this as we understand more.

## Are some people living with HIV more at-risk of getting ill?

People living with HIV who have a compromised immune system should be extra cautious to prevent coronavirus infection. These include people with

- a low CD4 count (<200 copies/cell),
- a high viral load,
- or a recent opportunistic infection (for example, tuberculosis (TB))

This is because your immune system may not be prepared to deal with the virus. We also know that people living with HIV are more vulnerable to respiratory infections when their HIV is not well managed. For this reason it's very important to be taking your antiretroviral treatment as prescribed – always, but especially during this time. Talk to your health provider if you are currently not taking treatment or if you are struggling with adherence.

Like in people not living with HIV, older people living with HIV and those living with underlying health conditions should also be vigilant.

## I am living with HIV, how can I prevent COVID-19?

The advice for people living with HIV is mostly the same as everyone else. Our [main COVID-19](#) page has lots of information about transmission, prevention and symptoms, but in short:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 40 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser for situations where you do not have access to soap and water.
- Avoid touching your face because this is one of the ways the virus enters your body.
- Avoid people who are feeling unwell.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a clean tissue when you sneeze or cough. After throw it away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, use the inside of your elbow to cover your mouth and nose.

Many countries are now asking people to stay inside in order to stop the spread of coronavirus in their community. If you are at-risk of developing severe COVID-19, you should limit physical contact to as few people as possible, ideally just those in your household.

## I am living with HIV, what should I do if I feel unwell?

If you're feeling unwell – you have a new persistent dry cough, a temperature, and/or loss or change in sense of smell or taste – stay at home and call your health worker. They will be able to tell you your next steps. During this time, make sure you avoid close contact with others. Most cases of COVID-19 are mild and will pass after seven days from when symptoms started.







## Tips on COVID-19 for people living with HIV

All people living with HIV should take the necessary precautions to protect themselves from coronavirus and ensure that they are adhering properly to their antiretroviral treatment. Your clinic or health care provider should let you know if they decide to change the way they deliver services during this pandemic. In the meantime:

- Try to stock-up on your antiretroviral treatment, so you have enough for at least 30 days, ideally for three months.
- Ensure your vaccinations are up to date (for example influenza and pneumococcal vaccines).
- Make sure you know how to get in touch with your health care facility and that you have a plan in place if you feel unwell and need to stay at home.
- Make sure you are eating well, exercising as best you can (even at home), and looking after your mental health

During this time, some governments are asking people to avoid other people and to stay inside in order to stop the spread of the virus. This may be particularly difficult for some people. Keeping in touch with people remotely, such as online, by phone or by video chat, can help you to stay socially connected and mentally healthy.

## Preparing for COVID-19 if you're living with HIV

TAKE ACTION TO AVOID COVID-19	CONTINUE YOUR TREATMENT	STOCK UP ON ART
 <p>Follow the general prevention advice.</p>	 <p>Take your ART to keep your immune system healthy.</p>	 <p>Have a <b>30-DAY</b> supply of your ART, ideally 3 months.</p>
CHECK YOU'RE UP TO DATE...	HAVE A PLAN IN PLACE...	LOOK AFTER YOURSELF
 <p>...with your immunisations.</p>	 <p>...for if you feel unwell and need to stay at home.</p>	 <p>Eat well, exercise and look after your mental health.</p>

**Avert** [www.avert.org/coronavirus](http://www.avert.org/coronavirus)

Remember, the situation is currently ongoing. As more people acquire the virus, we will learn more about how it behaves. We urge you to keep an eye on advice from:

- the [World Health Organization](#),
- your country's national public health department,
- local HIV organisations,
- your own doctor.

## HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to date information.

We provide all this for FREE, but it takes time and money to keep Avert.org going.

[Can you support us and protect our future?](#)

Every contribution helps, no matter how small.

**PLEASE DONATE NOW**



## Sources:

World Health Organization (2020)

i-base

CROI website

BHIVA

UNAIDS