



Frequently Asked Questions: Coronavirus (COVID-19) and HIV

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a very large family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause cold-like illness in people. Others cause illness in certain types of animals like cattle, camels and bats. The virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) likely originated in an animal and spread to humans.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new virus in the coronavirus family that had not been identified before. The virus was first identified in Wuhan, China in late 2019. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath. It can range from mild illness to severe illness and death.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Coronaviruses spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing and sneezing
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes



Am I at greater risk for acquiring COVID-19 if I am HIV positive?

Right now, we do not have enough information about COVID-19 to know whether people living with HIV are at higher risk of COVID-19 than people without HIV.

We do know that the two main risks for coronavirus infection are travel to an affected country (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>) and contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, especially close, prolonged contact.

Like other respiratory viruses, people living with HIV who have undetectable viral loads and CD4 counts above 200 are likely at the same risk of getting COVID-19 as anyone else in the population. However, COVID-19 can be more serious among older people and people with underlying medical conditions, like heart disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes, high blood pressure or cancer. In addition, people with lower CD4 counts (<200 cells/mL), may also experience more severe illness, like pneumonia that requires hospitalization.

If you have fever, cough or shortness of breath, contact your health care provider. If you've traveled to an affected country in the last 14 days or you've had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, let them know so the clinic can be prepared to take good care of you.

How can I stay healthy?

You can protect yourself from acquiring COVID-19 by using simple measures, like regularly washing your hands and avoiding contact with sick people. These measures help protect against other infections as well.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when you sneeze or cough.
- Stay home while you're sick.

You should also take your medications as prescribed, eat well, stay hydrated, exercise and get good sleep. Also, if you haven't had your vaccinations for influenza and pneumonia, now is a great time to get them.



What does social distancing mean and how does that help to keep me healthy?

Social distancing is a strategy encouraged by Public Health officials to stop or slow down the spread of a contagious disease, such as COVID-19. Social distancing measures include limiting large groups of people coming together, closing buildings and canceling events. To help slow the transmission of COVID-19 in Oregon, Governor Kate Brown signed an executive order to temporarily limit the size of events, has closed schools and is encouraging people to stay a minimum of three feet from others when out and about, like going to the grocery store. Governor Brown also advises individuals over 60 years of age or with an underlying health condition to avoid social and community gatherings. Social distancing is a scientifically proven method to reduce opportunities for person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. You may have already received notice that some of your regular group events and meetings have been canceled, rescheduled or conducted virtually. This is a preventive measure to help keep the community healthy.

If I feel sick should I go to the clinic or emergency room?

There are no medications specifically approved for COVID-19. Most people with mild illness will recover on their own by drinking plenty of fluids, resting, and taking pain and fever medications. However, some people develop pneumonia and require medical care or hospitalization.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. People also experience muscle and joint aches, headache and diarrhea. If you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath, call your provider's office. They will help you decide whether you should go into the office or go to the ER for an evaluation. If you've traveled to an affected country in the last 14 days or you've had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, let your doctor know. You may be asked to wear a mask when you arrive at your clinic or the ER.



I prefer not to travel to my pharmacy right now. Can my medications be mailed to me?

Many pharmacies offer a service that mails your medications to your home. Call your pharmacy to find out what options they can offer.

If you are on the CAREAssist program and want to receive your medications by mail, call the pharmacy below and a staff person will collect your information and work with your current pharmacy to transfer your prescriptions.

CVS Pharmacy Specialty Services
538 SW 4th Ave
Portland, OR 97204
503-227-0468

In order to have extra medications on hand, pick up medications as soon as you are able each month. This is a good practice regardless of COVID-19.

Are HIV medications being used to treat COVID-19?

Currently, there is no approved treatment for COVID-19. Scientists are studying a variety of medications, including HIV medications. COVID-19 is not a direct relative of HIV and it is not yet known if any current HIV medications have any specific effect on COVID-19. Some of the investigational drugs may have similar names to HIV medications. Do not share HIV medications with anyone they are not prescribed to. Only take your medications as prescribed by your medical provider.

Is there a risk of HIV medication shortage?

Pharmaceutical companies report no expected impact on HIV medication supply at this time.



What can I do to support my mental health during this time?

Fear and worry are normal feelings that people will experience during this time. It is important to take care of yourself and others and seek help from your healthcare provider if stress reactions interfere with your daily activities.

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19. Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do some other activities you enjoy to return to your normal life.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs that may heighten anxiety or depression.
- Connect with others. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships.
- Check in with your community (neighbors, friends, family, etc.) if you are able. Keep in contact with your community via phone calls, texts or social media if you are not able to leave the house.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking. Remember your resiliency.

I have more questions. Who can help?

Stay informed about the situation in Oregon: healthoregon.org/coronavirus or you can call 211 for general information.

The State of Oregon's Updated Mitigation Measures on Coronavirus Response (March 12, 2020) can be found here: <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Documents/updated-mitigation-measures-coronavirus-response.pdf>

HIV case managers are also available across the State. You can locate a case manager near you at the following link:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DiseasesConditions/HIVSTDViralHepatitis/HIVCareTreatment/Pages/cmcontacts.aspx>