

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected with race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or gender. Viruses do not discriminate. Everyone, including people living with HIV, should do what they can to reduce exposure to COVID-19 and keep their communities safe. People living with HIV have experienced decades of resilience, and many will continue that through and after COVID-19 – but there will be challenges.

Currently, the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 for people living with HIV is unknown. We know that disease outbreaks may cause fear and anxiety. Without specific knowledge about the effects of COVID-19 on people living with HIV, the community may experience an extra level of uncertainty. We encourage everyone to take care of themselves and to connect with loved ones often.

Nearly half of people in the United States living with HIV are older than 50 years. People living with HIV also have higher rates of other chronic health conditions. Both of these can increase the risk for more severe illness if people living with HIV get COVID-19.

Until more is known, people living with HIV should be cautious, pay attention, and follow prevention measures and recommendations closely. We are here to make sure everyone is taken care of -- we will make it through this together.

What people living with HIV need to know about COVID-19

Since COVID-19 is a new disease, there is much more to learn about how the virus affects people living with HIV. Early information shows the risk of getting very sick is greatest in:

- People with a low CD4 cell count.
- People not on HIV treatment (antiretroviral therapy or ART).
- Older people (over age 60), especially those over 80 years.
- People who have chronic medical conditions like heart, lung, or kidney disease, or diabetes.

The disease most likely spreads the same way as similar respiratory illnesses including:

- Person-to-person contact.
- Contaminated surfaces or objects.

Reducing potential exposure is especially important for people at higher risk for serious illness. People at higher risk should stay at home as much as possible and pay extra attention to preventive measures. If you need something, reach out for help. Be sure to pay attention to your mental health.

Supporting Long-Term Survivors

Powerful HIV drugs now make it possible for people living with HIV to live longer lives than could have been imagined before effective HIV treatment became available in the mid-1990s. Those who lived with HIV

before those medicines were introduced and continue to live with HIV today are often referred to as long-term survivors. Long-term survivors may face a higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. You can help limit their exposure to COVID-19 by offering to get groceries or picking up prescriptions if you have the capabilities to do so.

Many long-term survivors are older than 50 years, and some may be experiencing "AIDS Survivor Syndrome," which can result from living through the HIV pandemic. These long-term survivors may be socially distant from the community as many of their friends and peers have died. Commit to reaching out to your community's long-term survivors via chat or phone call. This can help alleviate depression and combat social isolation.

Many long-term survivors are living very healthy and happy lives, and we all can learn from their resiliency. Call them, listen to their stories, and then share them with others so they continue to have a seat at the table that they put in place.

Ensuring you have enough medication and the cost is covered

Colorado SDAP has different types of assistance that can prevent you from losing access to your prescribed medications, even temporarily. If you lose your job or get a notice that you are losing your health coverage (including Medicare or Medicaid), call the SDAP help desk at 303-692-2716 immediately, and we will let you know about your options. We want to support physical distancing and provide you with options to receive services while also avoiding exposure to COVID-19. As of March 17, SDAP will:

- Allow a 90-day fill for drugs, as long as your insurance plan allows for a 90-day fill.¹
 - For those without access to insurance we are allowing a 90-day fill for all HIV Medication Assistance Program Members (HMAP)
- Yearly medication limits for Medicare clients are being waived to allow for early fills where appropriate. Co-pay limits for Medicare and insurance coverages and the need for the pharmacy to send in supporting documents are also waived.
- For clients who need to re-enroll in programs, please call the SDAP help desk at 303-692-2716, and ask if you qualify for monthly extensions until you are able to provide a completed application.
- Many pharmacies offer a service to mail your medications to your home. Call your pharmacy to find out what options they can offer.

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Protecting yourself and your loved ones from COVID-19

... through everyday actions

- Make or buy a cloth covering for your mouth and nose and use it whenever you are outside your own house or yard. Scarves and bandanas will work as coverings. Wash your face covering frequently.
- Frequently and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash, or use your inner elbow or sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home if you're sick, and keep your children home if they are sick.

- Clean surfaces in your home, and personal items such as cell phones, using regular household products

Reach out for assistance when you need

There is no weakness in asking for help when our situations change so dramatically and quickly. Most people don't even know where to find help. Others might be too proud or afraid to even ask for help when they realize they can not survive on their own.

CDPHE continues to provide essential services for people living with HIV. If you have questions or need help navigating services during COVID-19, reach out so we can make sure you stay healthy and thriving.

Services for people living with HIV

Maria Jackson

maria.jackson@state.co.us

303-692-2785

State Drug Assistance Program or AIDS Drug Assistance Program

Jeremy Martinez

jeremy.martinez@state.co.us

303-692-2687

Additional resources

- [COVID-19: What people with HIV should know](#)
Center for Disease Control's FAQ on COVID-19 for people living with HIV and their providers.
- [Interim Guidance for COVID-19 and Persons with HIV](#)
Health and Human Services' information and guidance for health care providers and people living with HIV in the United States.
- [Sex and the Coronavirus](#)
NYC's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene created a guide outlining safer sex practices with COVID-19.
- [Guidance for People Who Use Drugs](#)
NYC's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene created a guide outlining tips for safer drug use.
- [Local Resources For Struggling Coloradans](#)
The Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition's guide to services remaining open during the COVID-19 pandemic.