



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

COVID-19: What People living with HIV Should Know¹

Coronavirus disease 2019, also known as COVID-19, is a new disease, caused by a new coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. The first infections were linked to a live animal market in China, but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why MOH recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

1. Are people with HIV at higher risk for COVID-19 than other people?

People with HIV can be at increased risk of getting very sick with COVID-19 based on their age and other medical conditions. The risk for people with HIV getting very sick is greatest in:

- People with a high viral load, and
- People not on HIV treatment (antiretroviral therapy or ART).

2. What can people with HIV do to protect themselves from COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent getting sick is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

- Take everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Take your ART medication daily, correctly and consistently to achieve low detectable level of viral suppression. This is the best way to keep your immune system healthy.
- Make sure you have at least a 30-day supply of your HIV medicine and any other medications you need for managing HIV.
- Talk to your health care provider about multiple month dispensing of HIV medicines.

¹Reference: CDC. [COVID-19: What people with HIV should know](#). March 2020

- If you have stopped taking your HIV medication or are currently out of medication, contact your nearest health facility to collect your HIV medication refill immediately.
- People with HIV should continue to maintain a healthy lifestyle. This includes:
 - Eating right,
 - Getting at least 8 hours of sleep, and
 - Reducing stress as much as possible
- Always have the health facility emergency contact information with you and communicate with your provider by phone or text.
- Stay socially connected and mentally healthy by maintaining a social network remotely.

3. What should I do if I think I might have COVID-19?

Call your health care provider if you develop symptoms that could be consistent with COVID-19. The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure**.²

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Follow the steps below if you get sick:

- Stay home except to get medical care
- Separate yourself from other people in your home
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor and tell them you have or may have COVID-19
- Wear a facemask
- Cover your coughs and sneezes; and wash hands immediately. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol
- Clean your hands often
- Avoid sharing personal household items
- Clean all commonly touched surfaces everyday
- Monitor your symptoms

4. Can HIV medicine (ART) be used to treat COVID-19?

² This is based on what has been seen previously as the incubation period in other similar viruses.

There are no data available yet from research that HIV medicine can help people with COVID-19.

People with HIV should not switch their HIV medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19.

Everyday Preventive Actions to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019, also known as COVID-19, is a new disease, caused by a new coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. The first infections were linked to a live animal market in China, but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why MOH recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

Take Steps to Protect Yourself

1. Clean your hands often

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

2. Avoid close contact

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid shaking hands
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

Take steps to protect others

1. Stay home, except to get medical care.

2. Cover coughs and sneezes.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

3. Wear a facemask if you are sick

- If you are sick: You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
- If you are NOT sick: You do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick (and they are not able to wear a facemask).

4. Clean and disinfect

- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean them: Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.