

SECTION 13

COVID-19

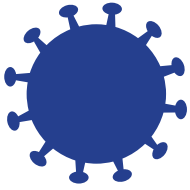
This section provides information about COVID-19 for people living with HIV.

What is COVID-19 and how do you get it? How can COVID-19 be prevented? What happens to people with COVID-19? Why does COVID-19 matter to people living with HIV? Why does COVID-19 matter to people with TB? What are the symptoms of COVID-19? What are tests for COVID-19? How is COVID-19 treated?



After reading this section, you will have a basic understanding of:

- » What COVID-19 is
- » How someone can get COVID-19
- » How to prevent COVID-19
- » What can happen to someone with COVID-19
 - COVID-19 and other conditions
 - COVID-19 symptoms
 - Longer-term outcomes
- » COVID-19 and HIV
- » COVID-19 and TB
- » COVID-19 testing
- » COVID-19 treatment
- » COVID-19 Q and A



WHAT IS COVID-19?

CO

CORONA

VI

VIRUS

D

DISEASE

-19

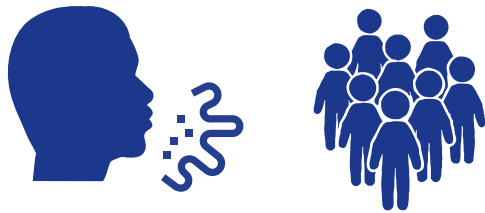
2019

COVID-19 is the name of an illness that is caused by a new **coronavirus** (CO is short for corona, VI is short for virus, and D is short for disease).

The new coronavirus began making people ill at the end of 2019. It has spread across the world.

Coronaviruses got their name from the crown-like spikes that stick out from them.

There are many different coronaviruses. Some of them cause the common cold. Other coronaviruses, such as **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)** and **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)**, can be deadly.



HOW DO YOU GET COVID-19?

COVID-19 **passes through the air**, in tiny coronavirus particles that cannot be seen without a microscope. They enter the air when a person who has COVID-19 breathes out, speaks, sings, coughs or sneezes. You can get COVID-19 from breathing in these coronavirus particles or if they land inside your eyes, nose or mouth.

COVID-19 is usually **passed between people in crowded indoor quarters** where there is little or no airflow. It is possible, but not very likely, to become infected by touching a contaminated surface such as a cell phone or a doorknob and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.



HOW CAN YOU PREVENT COVID-19?

Fresh air, sunshine and the outdoors are your friends. COVID-19 spreads through the air we breathe. People can spread COVID-19 without knowing it, either before they fall ill, or because they do not have any symptoms.

COVID-19 CAN BE PREVENTED BY

1. **Wearing a mask** over your mouth and nose outside of your home, both when you are indoors and outdoors;
2. **Distancing** – keep 2 meters away from other people, especially if you are indoors and/or if they are ill;
3. **Staying outdoors** as much as possible, since the sun can break down the virus and the wind can blow it away;
4. Opening the windows when you are inside to get **fresh air** flowing;
5. **Washing your hands** often, for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or hand sanitiser that is at least 70% alcohol;
6. **Staying home** – and away from other people – if you feel ill;
7. If you are coughing or sneezing, do it into your elbow or use a tissue and throw it away immediately;
8. Picking up a multi-month supply of antiretrovirals (ARVs) to avoid extra trips to the clinic;
9. Staying out of clinics and hospitals unless you think you are ill with COVID-19. If you have a fever and it is hard for you to breathe, it is important to call or go to your health centre right away and let them know about your symptoms;
10. Getting all recommended vaccines to prevent other illnesses, especially influenza (flu).

Researchers are working on vaccines to prevent COVID-19; several are in clinical trials.

WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WITH COVID-19?

Overall, 20% of people who have COVID-19 will become seriously ill, and 5% of this group will become critically ill; some people in this group do not survive. It is rare for children to fall seriously ill and die from COVID-19.



COVID-19 AND OTHER CONDITIONS

Although they are no more likely to get COVID-19, than anyone else, some people are at higher risk of becoming very ill or dying from COVID-19. This group includes people **over age 65** and people with other medical conditions (**diabetes, hypertension, HIV, tuberculosis [TB], uncontrolled asthma and obesity**).

Diabetes – and **high blood sugar** – increase the risk of death from COVID-19 by 13 times, more than any other comorbidity. The risk is highest for people with diabetes who are elderly and/or also have kidney disease.

During COVID-19's peak in the Western Cape, people with diabetes made up 52 of every 100 deaths from COVID-19. The provincial health department implemented a life-saving project: the **Virtual Emergency Care Tactical Operation (VECTOR)** team.

The VECTOR team used medical records to find people with diabetes and COVID-19 instead of waiting until they were ill enough to need hospitalization. Even if they were not ill, people at the highest risk of death from COVID-19 were offered hospitalization, where they were given oxygen and their blood sugar was controlled.

The VECTOR team also monitored people who did not want to go to the hospital, in case their condition worsened. Within a month, the VECTOR team's intervention lowered the death rate among this high-risk group from 28% to 4.5%.

Obesity increases the risk of death from COVID-19; weight loss, exercise and a healthy diet lowers the risk.

People who are members of these vulnerable groups should do everything they can to take care of their health and lower their risk of COVID-19, such as wearing masks, avoiding indoor crowded spaces and close contact with other people, and washing their hands often.

People from vulnerable groups also need to make sure they get the support they need from their families, friends and colleagues to take extra care. Just like with HIV, we all need to support each other!



Usually, people fall ill within 2–14 days after they have been infected with COVID-19, although up to 45% of people who have COVID-19 never feel ill.

THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 ARE:

- » Fever
- » Chills
- » Dry cough
- » Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- » Appetite loss
- » Fatigue
- » Muscle or body aches
- » Headache
- » New loss of taste or smell
- » Sore throat
- » Congestion or runny nose
- » Nausea or vomiting
- » Diarrhea
- » Conjunctivitis
- » Skin rash
- » Red or purplish fingers or toes

COVID-19 can cause stroke, heart attack, and permanent lung damage. Also, some people with COVID-19 feel ill for months afterwards. They may have trouble with breathing, remembering things and concentrating, headaches, irregular heartbeat, weakness and lack of energy, muscle aches, loss of smell and taste, difficulty concentrating and remembering things, diarrhoea and nausea.

Because this is a new illness, researchers are still learning about it and working to figure out what causes these symptoms and how to treat people who are having them.



WHY DOES COVID-19 MATTER TO PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV?

If you have just been diagnosed with HIV, starting ART right away is the most important thing you can do to lower your risk of serious illness. Seek remote support from someone at your health centre and find virtual support groups to help you adjust to the new diagnosis and your daily medication.

People living with HIV who have COVID-19 symptoms and a **low CD4 cell count** (less than 200 cells/ mm³) should be **tested for pneumocystis jirovecii pneumonia (PCP)** if they are not taking cotrimoxazole and COVID-19 so they can be properly treated.

In the Western Cape, people living with HIV were twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than HIV negative people. Although this sounds scary, having HIV is not nearly as big a risk as other conditions (see p.xx). But it is important to **keep taking your ARVs**, protect yourself and others by wearing a mask, avoiding crowds – especially indoors – and people who are ill. Ask for several months of ARVs at a time and see if you can collect them somewhere outside of your health centre.



WHY DOES COVID-19 MATTER TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE TB ?

TB and COVID-19 are both spread through the air.

People who have TB are also more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as people who do not have TB, making it especially important to protect yourself.

The **symptoms of TB and COVID-19 are similar**: difficulty breathing, coughing, and fever, since both attack your lungs. If you are ill and think you may have been at risk of TB, it is a good idea to be tested for both illnesses.

If you have TB, it is important to **keep taking your treatment** even if you fall ill with COVID-19. Ask for several months of it at a time and see if you can collect your TB treatment somewhere outside of your health centre.



TESTING FOR COVID-19

There are different types of tests for COVID-19. A **viral load** or **PCR test** looks for the coronavirus in a person's nose, using a 15.24 cm swab.

COVID-19 testing is recommended for anyone with symptoms or who has been in close contact (meaning face-to-face or within a closed space with a person who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes; this includes people who live in the same household or work together). If you need to be tested for COVID-19, speak with a healthcare professional who can order a test for you.

Public sector testing for COVID-19 is free. If you are using a private laboratory, check for coverage and cost.



HOW IS COVID-19 TREATED?

Most people will recover by themselves at home, while **self-isolating to prevent COVID-19 from spreading**. Fever can be treated with paracetamol. People who are taking medicine for asthma, hypertension, diabetes, HIV or other conditions should continue taking it.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may worsen; if you have trouble taking care of yourself or have trouble breathing, consult your doctor or health centre right away. You may need to be **hospitalized**, where you will get **oxygen to help you breathe** and medicine to reduce fever. This is especially important for people who are **over age 65** and/or living with **HIV, diabetes** and **heart disease**.

Dexamethasone, a steroid, is recommended for seriously ill people with COVID-19 who are in the hospital on oxygen or a ventilator (a machine that helps people who cannot breathe on their own).



Q AND A

1. WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the name of the illness that is caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

2. HOW DO YOU GET COVID-19?

COVID-19 spreads through the air. When a person who has COVID-19 breathes out, speaks, sings, coughs or sneezes, this tiny coronavirus enters the air. You can get infected from inhale it, or if they land inside your eyes, nose or mouth.

3. HOW CAN YOU PREVENT COVID-19?

Wearing a mask over your nose and mouth when you are not at home and staying 2 meters away from other people (especially if you are indoors), will lower your risk for COVID-19. When you are indoors, open the windows to get fresh air flowing in and out. Also, wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water or hand sanitiser that is at least 70% alcohol.

4. WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE COVID-19?

Some people never feel ill, while others feel unwell for months. Overall, around 20% of people become very ill, and 5% become critically ill; some of them do not survive.

5. IS COVID-19 WORSE FOR PEOPLE WITH OTHER CONDITIONS?

People who are over age 65 and/or have other conditions are at higher risk for falling seriously ill and dying from COVID-19. These conditions include diabetes, hypertension, HIV, TB, uncontrolled asthma and obesity.

6. IS COVID-19 WORSE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV?

The risk of dying from COVID-19 is twice as high among people living with HIV than people who are HIV-negative. It is important to continue – or start- taking ARVs, and to see if you can pick up several months at a time so you don't need to go to your clinic as often.

7. IS COVID-19 WORSE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE TB?

The risk of dying from COVID-19 is twice as high among people who have TB than people who do not. It is important to continue your TB treatment and to see if you can pick up several months at a time so you don't need to go to your clinic as often.

8. WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

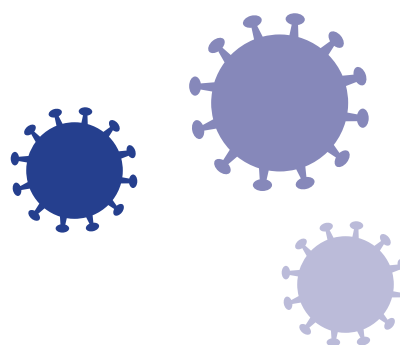
There are many symptoms of COVID-19; the most common are fever, dry cough, sore throat, tiredness, and headache. People may also have diarrhoea and nausea and lose their sense of taste and smell.

9. HOW DO YOU GET TESTED FOR COVID-19?

COVID-19 testing is done with a long swab that goes up your nose to look for the coronavirus. If you have symptoms or think that you have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, consult a healthcare provider about testing.

10. HOW IS COVID-19 TREATED?

Most people will be able to rest and recover at home, taking paracetamol for fever. If you have difficulty breathing, call a health centre right away. You may need to go to the hospital, where you will be given oxygen to help you breathe, and medicine to lower your fever. For people in the hospital who become very ill, a steroid called dexamethasone is sometimes used.



RESOURCES

For information on COVID-19 testing, call the National Institute of Communicable Diseases helpline at 0800 029 999

- Republic of South Africa Health Department. COVID-19 Coronavirus South African Resource Portal. Available at <https://sacoronavirus.co.za>
- National Institute of Communicable Diseases. COVID-19 Guidelines. Available at <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-guidelines/clinical-management-of-suspected-or-confirmed-covid-19-disease/>

CLINICAL TRIALS

In South Africa, clinical trials of vaccines to prevent COVID-19 are enrolling volunteers.

The University of Witwatersrand is sponsoring a 2,000-person phase 2 coronavirus vaccine trial in adults ages 18 to 65, including people living with HIV. The vaccine was developed at Oxford University.

For more information, see: <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04444674?term=south+africa+and+COVID-19+vaccine&draw=2&rank=1>

Novovax is sponsoring a 2,904-person, phase 2 trial of its coronavirus vaccine in adults ages 18 to 64, including people living with HIV.

For more information, see: <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04533399?term=south+africa+and+COVID-19+vaccine&draw=2&rank=2>