

UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa

COVID-19 and HIV

Questions and Answers for Adolescents living with HIV in time of COVID-19

This Q+A was developed by UNICEF ESARO in partnership with [Y+ Global](#) and country-level networks of adolescents and young people living with HIV (A&YPLHIV) in Eastern and Southern Africa. The questions are directly from A&YPLHIV and were the most common questions submitted through social media. They focus on key concerns specific to A&YPLHIV about COVID-19. General COVID-19 Q+As can be found [here](#) and through links below.

1) Are people living with HIV at higher risk of getting COVID-19?

It does not matter if you are young, old, living with HIV or any other illnesses, everyone is at risk if in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

This is why it is important to follow the prevention advice given and get help if you show symptoms. Check out the links below for more information.

2) If I get COVID-19, and I am living with HIV, am I more likely to become very sick and die?

We still do not know if people living with HIV and affected with COVID-19 may become sicker than those who do not have HIV.

We do know that those who have weaker immune systems are less able to fight infections and illnesses –including COVID-19.

Without ARVs, HIV attacks and weakens the immune system. That's why it's important to continue to take your ARVs to make sure your immune system is strong.

3) Is it still safe to go to the hospital or attend my clinic appointment?

In most countries, you can still attend medical appointments. It is best to check locally with your clinic to find out what options are available to you and how to get the services you need. If possible, it is best to do this by phone.

In some countries, if you are virally suppressed and well you may not need to come to the clinic as often and be given a longer supply of ARVs.

Your clinic may offer you a telephone appointment instead of coming into the clinic. Update your contact details with the clinic so they can get hold of you and also have the clinic's number with you in case you need to call them.

If you are registered with a clinic far away, you may want to go to a clinic closer to your home during this time.

If you need to go to the clinic and use public transport, follow the COVID-19 prevention advice to keep yourself safe. Check out the links below for more information. You may need a letter or proof of your appointment to travel - ask your clinic if this is needed.

4) What should I do if I am running low of ARVs?

If you are running low of ARVs it is best to contact your clinic or call the toll-free health helpline for their advice on what options are available to you. For example, doorstep ARV deliveries, community dispensing, etc.

Where possible, ask for a longer supply of ARVs - at least for 3 months - especially before quarantine or lockdown.

If others in your household attend the clinic and know your status, ask them to collect ARVs for you.

If you have to collect your ARVs from the clinic, follow the prevention advice. Check out the links below for more information.

5) Can ARVs treat COVID-19?

Up to now, no vaccine or medicine can prevent or treat COVID-19. In most cases, symptoms are mild or can be managed and most patients recover.

Research is ongoing to find the best treatments and vaccines.

6) My support group is no longer meeting, where else can I get support?

Keep in touch with your peer group and friends through WhatsApp, SMS and other social media. Remember to respect others and their privacy in online spaces.

Reach out to your local network of young people living with HIV to see how they can support you.

If there is someone in your home that you trust, a family member or other, talk with them about how you are feeling and how they can support you.

Call your clinic nurse or counsellor or when attending clinic ask for time to talk with them.

During this difficult time, it is normal to feel anxious and/or lonely. Look for new ways to look after yourself: exercise every day, be open about your feelings, ask questions about your health, read a book, listen to music, avoid negative influences, use and share information from reliable sources and if you can, reach out and encourage your peers to do the same.

7) Is it safe to kiss, hug or have sex?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 is sexually transmitted. But it does spread through small droplets from the nose or mouth when someone coughs and breathes out and you are in close contact with them.

Coming into contact with someone's spit - like through kissing - or being physically intimate with them – like during hugs or sex - can easily spread COVID-19.

If you and your partner live in the same household, are following COVID-19 prevention advice and don't have symptoms, always practice safe sex, such as using a condom. If you are sexually active and are running low on contraceptives, such as the pill, or condoms, please contact your clinic for advice on how to get a refill.

8) If I get tested for COVID-19, do I have to tell them I am living with HIV?

Your HIV status is yours to share and you should not feel pressured to tell anyone. However, telling your healthcare worker about your status or any other health conditions can help them to make sure you get the best possible care.

Remember that laws exist to protect your right to confidentiality, which healthcare workers must follow.

9) A family member is very angry at me – yelling at me about having HIV. I feel scared they will hurt me, but we can't leave the house. What can I do?

COVID-19 is creating fear, stress and anxiety, but violence is never ok. If you feel your safety is at risk or you are experiencing violence, you have the right to reach out to seek help and leave. Remember it is not your fault.

It can be hard to know where to get help. Think of a supporter you can trust and reach out to. Ask your clinic or call the toll-free health or child helpline for services that can support you.

Need more information?

- **For general information on COVID-19 visit:**
 - [World Health Organization](#)
 - [UNICEF](#)
 - [Internet of Good Things](#)
- **For advice on pregnancy and breastfeeding during COVID-19 visit:** [WHO](#) and [UNICEF South Africa](#)
- **For advice on looking after your mental health during COVID-19 check out this [UNICEF article](#)**
- **For more advice on sexual health check out the [IPPF blog](#)**
- **To take action and be involved:**
 - Visit [Voices of Youth](#)
 - Join the [URreport platform](#)
- **To stay up to date join WHO's Health Alert on Whatsapp. For English, Send "hi" to +41 79 893 18 92 on WhatsApp or follow the link: wa.me/41798931892?text=hi**

Have more questions but can't find answers?

Send your questions to Y+ via: [Email](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)