

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

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Nearly half of people in the U.S. diagnosed with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, are over 50, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). HIV damages the body's immune system, and

interferes with the body's ability to fight infection and disease. Does that make it more difficult to fight off COVID-19?

Dr. Stacey Rizza, an [infectious diseases](#) specialist at Mayo Clinic, says, "We know that anybody who has a suppressed immune system may have an altered response to the virus that causes COVID-19. We know that older people whose immune systems are a little weaker, and people who have medical issues or organ diseases, are going to generally do worse with the infection. If somebody has HIV and their immune system is weaker, meaning they're not on [therapy](#), or they're earlier on in their therapy and their CD4 count is still low, they may be at risk of having a worse reaction to the virus. We will learn more about SARS-CoV-2 on people living with HIV over time."

The CDC says the risk for people with HIV getting sick is greatest in people with a low CD4 cell count and people not on [antiretroviral therapy](#) for HIV.

"If somebody has HIV and is on therapy, and has a very strong immune system, the very early data we have so far is they seem to be doing OK," says Dr. Rizza. "We encourage people who have HIV to connect with their [health care provider](#), get therapy and take their medications regularly."

Dr. Rizza says recommendations for monitoring and testing are the same for all risk groups and have not changed. "We ask that anybody on the planet who has symptoms at this time consistent with COVID-19 to contact their health care provider and see if they need to be tested. This really is a global pandemic, and the whole world is going through it almost at the same time together. No matter what your medical background is, if you have symptoms, you may need to be quarantined and you may need to be tested."

Tips for people living with HIV include:

- Help your [immune system](#) fight off infection by staying healthy.
- Get plenty of rest and reduce stress.
- Practice social distancing.
- Have at least a 30-day supply of your HIV medicine, and any other medications or medical supplies you need to manage HIV.
- Establish a plan for clinical care with your health care provider.
- Maintain social connections remotely, such as online, by phone or by video chat.

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