

NEW JERSEY AIDS/HIV/STD HOTLINE

PRESS RELEASE

June 2020

HIV Testing and Treatment Remain Vitally Important During COVID-19 Staying Healthy During a Pandemic

(Newark, NJ) – As New Jersey continues to respond to the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) we cannot lose sight of other important pre-existing public health concerns, like HIV and AIDS. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial disruptions to normal life, leaving many to struggle with accessing medical care, and support services for chronic conditions. While this is a trying time for all, it is especially difficult for individuals living with HIV who must stay in treatment in order to remain healthy and keep their HIV viral loads at undetectable levels. Having low levels of the virus in the blood stops HIV infection from getting worse while also preventing the spread of HIV to partner(s).

At this time there is no evidence showing that individuals living with HIV, who are on effective antiretroviral treatment (ART), are at an increased risk for developing severe symptoms of COVID-19 than the general population.¹ However, individuals living with HIV who are not taking daily HIV treatment medicines to lower the amount of HIV in their bodies might be at greater risk for SARS-CoV-2 infection (the virus that causes COVID-19).² This concern is yet another reason why knowing and understanding your HIV status, and that of your sexual partner(s) is extremely important. HIV testing is the key to living healthy with HIV, even during a global pandemic. If diagnosed with HIV, be sure to get treatment immediately after learning your status. The sooner treatment begins, the better a person's chances of leading a long, healthy life. HIV is a manageable, chronic condition as long as the individual commits to staying in effective treatment.

Currently, there is no cure or set treatment plans for COVID-19, but there are simple steps an individual living with HIV can take to prevent the spread of, and complications from the virus that causes COVID-19;

- **Speak with your healthcare team about HIV medicines and treatment:** Talk with the healthcare team responsible for treating your HIV about stocking up on at least 30 days of antiretroviral medicines (3 months of medicine is ideal). Taking ARTs as well as maintaining good mental and physical health is the best way to keep your immune system healthy. It is also important to discuss any changes or disruptions to your healthcare team's office hours and services during the current pandemic.
- **Ensure vaccinations are up-to-date:** The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends high-risk groups, including people living with chronic conditions such as HIV, receive the injectable flu and pneumococcal vaccines.

^{1,2} CDC. [What to Know About HIV and COVID-19](#)

- **Take everyday preventive actions:** Everyday preventative measures can be incredibly helpful in stopping the spread of COVID-19;
 - Avoid close contact with anyone who seems to be sick and avoid going to work, school, or other public gatherings if you are not feeling well.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze. Do not sneeze or cough directly into your hands.
 - Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, mouth) as germs can easily spread this way.
 - Frequently wash your hands with soap and warm water (best option). If that is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 % alcohol as the active ingredient. It is also important to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects as they can be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 virus.
 - Wear a face mask or covering when in public places or gatherings.
- **Speak to a medical professional at the FIRST sign of symptoms:** Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 include; persistent dry cough, fever, shortness of breath, chills, shivering, muscles aches and pains, headaches, sore throat, and a new loss of taste or smell. If you're feeling sick or exhibiting two or more of these symptoms, avoid contact with others and reach out to a healthcare professional immediately. If you're looking for additional medical information on COVID-19, you can call the health professionals at the New Jersey COVID-19 Hotline at the NJ Poison Control Center, 1-800-962-1253. All services are free, confidential, 24/7, and information can be given in any language.

June 27th is National HIV Testing Day! Ending HIV starts with knowing your HIV status, your risk, your prevention options, and your treatment options. Knowing your status lets you take charge of your health; HIV is a manageable, chronic condition when an individual is on effective HIV treatment. If you do not know your status or can't remember the last time you were tested for HIV, now's the time to get tested. New Jersey residents can contact the [NJ AIDS HIV/STD Hotline](#) at 1-800-624-2377 to find a free testing site near you.

New Jersey offers free HIV and other STI services to all state residents via the hotline. Knowing who to call for resources and information is the first step in ending the HIV epidemic in New Jersey. The hotline is staffed by health professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide free, confidential help via phone at 1-800-624-2377, text/email at 8006242377@njpies.org, or [chat here](#)

- Referrals for testing sites and other related services
 - HIV, STI and hepatitis prevention and treatment information
 - Side effects from medicines used to treat HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
 - Referrals to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) services
 - Counseling and treatment locations
 - Partner notification
 - ADDP
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New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline

Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and pharmacists) provide telephone consultation for people seeking information about HIV/AIDS, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) including hepatitis. Callers receive information tailored to their needs; discussion about prevention, referrals for testing sites and other related services, counseling and testing locations, and information on treatment and adverse reactions to medications. The hotline is administered by the New Jersey Poison Control Center and funded by the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of HIV, STD, and TB services.

Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: njms.rutgers.edu.

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