

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT COVID-19 AND HIV



The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is a new type of coronavirus that can affect people and cause the disease known as COVID-19

### 01 HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

The virus is **spread through the air if you come into contact with saliva or mucus produced by the coughing or sneezing** of someone who has the virus. Its capacity to spread depends on the amount of the virus in the respiratory tract. These secretions will infect another person if they enter into contact with their nose, eyes, or mouth. Transmission by air over distances greater than 1-2 metres seems unlikely. Furthermore, given that these drops may end up on surfaces, **the virus can also be transmitted by the touching eyes, nose or mouth after contact with contaminated surfaces.**

### 02 CAN IT BE TRANSMITTED SEXUALLY?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are not sexually transmitted infections. Remember, however, that this virus is found in the saliva and may therefore be transmitted through kissing.

### 03 WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The most common symptoms include **fever, cough, and shortness of breath.** In some cases there may also be digestive symptoms such as diarrhoea and abdominal pain. Most often, the disease is benign and the symptoms are mild. In more severe cases, the infection can cause pneumonia, serious breathing difficulty, kidney failure, and even death. The most severe cases generally occur in people who belong to a vulnerable group.

### 04 WHAT ARE THE VULNERABLE GROUPS?

The main vulnerable groups are **people over 60 years old** and those who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic lung diseases, cancer or immunodeficiency. As a precaution, **pregnant women** are also considered vulnerable.

### 05 DO PEOPLE WITH HIV RUN A GREATER RISK OF CATCHING SARS-COV-2?

The scientific evidence available to date does not suggest that people with HIV have a higher risk of being infected with the new coronavirus.

**gt** grupo de trabajo sobre tratamientos del VIH  
ENTIDAD DECLARADA DE UTILIDAD PÚBLICA  
ONG DE DESARROLLO

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## 06

### DO PEOPLE WITH HIV HAVE A HIGHER RISK OF SUFFERING SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS IF THEY DEVELOP COVID-19?

The scientific evidence currently available does not indicate that people with HIV have a higher risk of serious complications if they develop the disease. For the moment, it seems that people with HIV on antiretroviral therapy, with an undetectable viral load and a CD4 count of over 200 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, do not run a higher risk of developing serious complications than people without HIV. However, **as in the population at large, older people with HIV and/or those with previous conditions (comorbidities)**, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease, chronic lung diseases, cancer or immunosuppression (congenital, acquired or resulting from treatment with immunosuppressive drugs), are more likely to develop serious complications.

By way of an analogy to how other viruses behave in people with HIV, **immunocompromised persons with HIV** and a CD4 count of under 200 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, regardless of whether or not they take antiretroviral treatment, **should be considered among the vulnerable groups and therefore at higher risk of developing serious complications associated with COVID-19**. Please note, however, that to date there is no scientific evidence to confirm this<sup>1</sup>. These people are nevertheless particularly advised to stay at home.

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<sup>1</sup> COVID19: Lettre d'information (12/03/20). Information pour les personnes vivants avec le VIH concernant l'épidémie actuelle du coronavirus COVID-19. Société Française de Lutte contre le Sida (SFLS) et Société de Pathologie Infectieuse de Langue Française (SPILF)

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## 07

### CAN COVID-19 BE TREATED?

At the time of writing this fact sheet (March 2020), **there is no specific treatment**, although attempts are being made to develop preventive vaccines and new drugs to treat COVID-19, while other existing drugs are being tested in clinical trials. It is, however, important to bear in mind that **there are many treatments to control its more severe symptoms**. Good healthcare therefore improves prospects.

## 08

### CAN THE ANTIRETROVIRAL DRUGS PEOPLE WITH HIV TAKE PROTECT AGAINST SARS-COV-2 AND PREVENT COVID-19 FROM DEVELOPING?

Some studies indeed indicate that certain antiretroviral drugs (known as protease inhibitors) could offer some benefit in treating COVID 19. To date, however, **there are no indications that such antiretroviral drugs can provide effective protection against the transmission of SARS-CoV-2** in people who are taking them to treat infection with HIV.

## 09

### WHAT MEASURES SHOULD PEOPLE WITH HIV TAKE?

**There are no specific indications**. Experts advise that all people with HIV should follow the health and hygiene recommendations and measures of the health authorities, as this is a new virus about which much remains to be learned. **Maintaining good hand and respiratory tract hygiene is the main advice for limiting the spread of the virus**. It is therefore advisable to wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water (particularly before touching your face or preparing and eating food) and covering your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or inside a bent elbow when coughing or sneezing. It is also advisable to use a common cleaning product to disinfect the surfaces of frequently-touched objects. **However, in order to minimise the risk of contagion and transmission, the most important measure announced to date is to stay at home and only to go out if necessary**.



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## 10

### CAN PEOPLE WITH HIV GO TO HOSPITALS FOR THEIR SCHEDULED APPOINTMENTS OR TO COLLECT MEDICATION?

Infectious Disease Services, which generally provide clinical care for HIV, are currently on the front-line in dealing with the pandemic. **Many centres have therefore changed how they operate and have adopted special procedures to care for HIV patients and to dispense antiretroviral medication.** To facilitate the process, you should contact the doctor or the HIV unit before going to hospital. **Many HIV units have decided to postpone routine medical appointments and only to attend urgent cases. Everyone with HIV is nevertheless guaranteed a supply of antiretroviral medication even if appointments are postponed.** Changes in the routine protocols of hospitals have been made to reduce the influx of people in hospitals.

## 11

### WHO TO CONTACT IF SHOWING SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH POSSIBLE INFECTION WITH COVID-19

In the event of the appearance of symptoms compatible with COVID-19, **people with HIV should either call their health centre (primary care physician) or the numbers provided by their autonomous community** to obtain specific advice on what to do.

### FREE COVID-19 HELPLINE NUMBERS

Andalusia	900 400 061 / 955 545 060
Aragón	976 696 382
Asturias	984 100 400 / 900 878 232 / 112 + 1
Cantabria	900 612 112
Castile-La Mancha	900 122 112
Castile and León	900 222 000
Catalonia	061
Ceuta	900 720 692
Madrid Com.	900 102 112
Valencian Com.	900 300 555
Extremadura	900 222 012
Galicia	900 400 116
Balearic Islands	902 079 079 / 971 437 079
Canary Islands	900 112 061
La Rioja	941 298 333
Melilla	112
Murcia	900 121 212
Navarra	948 290 290
Basque Country	900 203 050



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