COVID-19 & HIV/AIDS

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2). HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Although the new coronavirus and HIV are both viruses, they are very different. COVID-19 attacks a person's lungs and HIV attacks a person's immune system.

They both can be spread from person-to-person but through very different ways. They also differ in prevention, testing and treatment.

How can COVID-19 and HIV be spread?

COVID-19

COVID-19 is a new infectious disease which was first identified late last year in China. **At present,** it is believed that this new virus **mainly** spreads from person-to-person through close contact with an infected person, or touching surfaces and objects contaminated with the virus, due to droplets from a cough or sneeze from an infected person. **However**, we are still learning more about how COVID-19 is spread.

HIV

HIV was first identified in the 1980s in the USA. Thus, we know much more about HIV than COVID-19. HIV spreads from person-to-person through an infected person's bodily fluids such as blood, sexual fluids and breastmilk. For example, if an infected person's blood comes into contact with your blood you may become infected.

Both COVID-19 and HIV can affect anyone at any age. We all need to protect ourselves from getting infected.

How to prevent COVID-19 and HIV?

COVID-19

There is no vaccine for COVID-19. The following ways can help you to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19:

- wash your hands with soap and water **properly and frequently** (at least 20 seconds each time), or use an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover coughs and sneezes using tissues, or your elbow if tissues are not available
- try to keep 1.5 meters distance between you and other people
- avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes
- follow all the restrictions advised by the Australian/Queensland Government relating to travel, non-essential gatherings including attending places of worship and social visits etc.

HIV

There is no vaccine for HIV either. Doing the following can help you to prevent HIV:

- Use condoms to prevent sexually transmitted HIV
- Avoid blood to blood contact to prevent blood transmitted HIV
- Do not breastfeed the baby if a mother infected with HIV
- Use HIV prevention medication including:
  -PrEP: it can be used by people who have not been exposed to HIV. All GPs can prescribe PrEP.
  -PEP: it can be used by people who may have been exposed to HIV. PEP must be taken within 72 hours after possible HIV exposure, earlier is better. Only hospital emergency departments, specialists and specifically trained GPs can prescribe PEP.

COVID-19 & HIV/AIDS

What are the consequences of COVID-19 and HIV?

COVID-19

As it is a new disease, we have limited knowledge about COVID-19. Current information tells us that many people with the infection, especially younger people, will generally experience a mild infection. Older people or people with other health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and lung disease are at higher risk of becoming severely ill after being infected with COVID-19. However, younger people can also get very sick from COVID-19.

The overall death rate reported for COVID-19 is over 3%. However, it varies from country to country.

HIV

HIV is a chronic viral infection. People can have HIV for many years without symptoms and feel healthy. Without treatment, over many years it can gradually weaken a person's immune system to a point that the person's immune system cannot protect the person from other diseases and infections. At this stage the person develops a group of symptoms and illnesses that is called AIDS. People can die from AIDS related diseases.

If a person with HIV takes treatment, they can live a normal life like everyone else. As the current treatment is not a cure, an infected person will need to take the treatment for life.

It is best for people to get tested and treated early in order to achieve the best health outcomes.

How do you know you have COVID-19 and HIV?

COVID-19

At present, COVID-19 is tested and diagnosed through a specific test by collecting samples from the respiratory tract of a person. You can get tested for COVID-19 if you meet the testing criteria. Please go to www.qld.gov.au for details. You should call your doctor ahead to advise them of your symptoms before your appointment. These may include cough, fever or difficulty breathing.

HIV

HIV can be tested and diagnosed through specific HIV blood tests. Any GP can order a HIV test. However, if you do not want to visit a GP during the COVID-19 outbreak, you can order a HIV self-test on-line for a cost of $25.00 plus postage & handling. Please go to www.atomohivtest.com for details.

What should I do if I have HIV during the current COVID-19 pandemic?

- ✓ Keep taking your medication if you are on the treatment
- ✓ Do not cancel your appointments or stop your treatment except you have been advised by your doctor
- ✓ Phone your doctor prior to your medical appointment if you have flu like symptoms and follow your doctor's instructions
- ✓ Have the flu vaccine when it is available
- ✓ Stay up to date with latest recommendations provided by the Government and Health Departments to protect yourself from COVID-19

Is there treatment for COVID-19 and HIV?

COVID-19

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 yet. There is only treatment for the symptoms.

HIV

Yes. There are very effective specific treatments for HIV.

You can find the latest COVID-19 information at the following websites:

www.health.gov.au

www.health.qld.gov.au

www.australia.gov.au

www.who.int

ECCQ

Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)
Website: www.eccq.com.au/health
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