



West County Health Centers

Caring for our Communities

a california *health*.center

Dear Friends,

In this time of disruption and uncertainty due to the coronavirus pandemic, many everyday things may become unusually stressful. Each of us may be taking different steps to keep ourselves safe and healthy, as we have been instructed by our Public Health leaders.

We fully support Sonoma County's "Shelter-in-Place" order to protect ourselves and our community. We also want you to know that we remain committed to being here for you and providing you accurate and hopefully helpful information as you make the decisions that are best for you and your health. Although we are not having in-person visits with everyone due to the SIP orders, we are still here, providing the same level of care as usual, but just doing it differently; via telephone and/or video visits, some in-person visits, for situations that cannot be handled remotely, and through the Patient Portal.

For those who are temporarily furloughed or laid off from work, there may be questions or concerns about your medical insurance coverage, and access to medications. If your insurance coverage has lapsed due to being unemployed, and you are not eligible for Medi-Cal, you can apply for an insurance plan through Covered California, and the AIDS Drug Assistance Plan, or ADAP, will pay for the monthly premium, up to \$1938 per month. Covered California has extended their open enrollment deadline until June 30, 2020. If you are currently enrolled in ADAP and due for a re-certification, ADAP has extended the deadline for that, also until June 30, 2020. Please call Chris Hightower at (707) 823-3166, ext. 6428 with questions about any of the above.

Here are some tips and other information that you may find useful:

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is spread by droplets that get into our bodies from breathing them in directly or spreading them from our hands to our nose, mouth or eyes. This is easier to do when we are close to other people.

How can I reduce my chances of getting infected?

Here are some proactive steps you can take to protect yourself:

- Maintain at least a 6-foot distance from other people ("social distancing").
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible, or use hand sanitizer.
- Cover coughs and sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands).



West County Health Centers

Caring for our Communities

a california *health*.center

- Regularly clean high-touch surfaces (phones, computer keyboards, coffee pots, etc.)
- Don't shake hands. Use alternatives such as elbow bumping. Get creative!
- Avoid people who are coughing or sick.
- Avoid large gatherings.

How does having HIV affect my risks for COVID?

We are still learning about this and don't have all the answers. We do not currently know if HIV on its own can increase a person's risk of getting COVID-19, or if HIV raises the risk of having more severe disease, but certainly people with other underlying health conditions should take these precautions. However, preliminary data coming out of Spain suggests that people living with HIV do NOT have an enhanced risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 illness), and that people living with HIV do NOT have a more severe illness if they do get infected with the virus. It is not clear, yet, if antiviral medication taken for HIV infection is somewhat protective, or not.

What should I do if I have symptoms that may be COVID-19?

If you experience fevers and cough or difficulty breathing, you should contact your primary care provider directly. You can call your Health Center, or you can send them a secure message if you have signed up for the Patient Portal.

Do I need to come in for my routine lab work during the "Shelter-in Place" order?

If you've been taking HIV medications for at least 12 months without any breaks and your lab work has been stable, it's safe to postpone your routine lab work temporarily (for the next 1-2 months).

When *should* I come in for lab work?

You should come in for lab work if:

- If you have symptoms of an STI – discharge from your penis or vagina; burning when you pee; sores on your genitals; or rashes - you should come in for testing and/or treatment as you normally would.
- If you have been exposed to syphilis or another STI from a sexual partner, contact your primary care provider for instructions on testing and treatment.
- Once things get back to normal, we recommend that you resume your routine testing schedule.



West County Health Centers

Caring for our Communities

a california *health*.center

What about getting refills on my meds?

Have your HIV and other chronic meds refilled before you run out. This will keep you from having to run to the pharmacy at the last minute. If you obtain your medications from a mail-order pharmacy, pay attention to your medication supply and reorder as soon as you are able. Often, you can reorder when you've used up 70% of your prescription, or about 65 days after your last refill if you get a 3-month supply.

Every person has a role to play. So much of protecting yourself, your family, friends and community comes down to these simple recommendations:

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. If surfaces are dirty, clean them using detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your elbow.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay away from work, school or other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough.
- Follow guidance from public health officials.

“Social distancing,” and even just the specter of COVID-19, can result in anxiety and loneliness. People with mental health or substance use challenges may be particularly vulnerable to the stresses of isolation, but everyone may be affected. Remember that “social distancing” really just means *physical* distancing (6 feet) from people who are not in your household. It is very important to maintain *social contacts*, as much as possible, during this stressful time. Especially if you are staying in your home, keep in touch with others through phone or video calls, and social media. Contact your health care providers know if you experience more depression, anxiety, or other symptoms of stress.

Let us know if you have any questions. Please click on this link to go directly to our website, where we've posted helpful links to more information about HIV and COVID-19: <https://www.wchealth.org/service/hiv-services/>.

And look here for more information from Sonoma County's Administration: <https://socoemergency.org/emergency/novel-coronavirus/>

Be safe and stay well!

Your Healthcare Team at WCHC