



**April 2020**

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HIV AND COVID-19 IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN MOBILITY**

### **HIV and COVID-19 in the context of human mobility**

- COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus, a new coronavirus associated with the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) viruses family and some coronaviruses associated with common cold.
- There is still no evidence that persons living with HIV have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or if they will experience further complications of the disease, in case of contracting it. Nevertheless, it is very important that persons with HIV take all necessary precautions to prevent the spread.
- Persons over age 60, living with HIV or those with additional health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, or heart or lung conditions, may have an increased risk of contagion and experiencing complications from COVID-19.
- Migrants and refugees living with HIV and who are not taking antiretroviral treatment (ART), may also have an increased risk of developing complications from COVID-19, thus it is important that they follow the self-protection recommendations, reducing risk factors.
- Migrants and refugees belonging to the LGBTIQ community may have additional barriers to access basic services, especially health services, hence self-care is key in this context.
- Below are some recommendations for self-care and preparation in the context of COVID-19 especially for migrants and refugees, as a way to make documented and differentiated information available for persons living with HIV.

### **Self-care, information and preparation for the COVID-19 pandemic, for migrants and refugees living with HIV**

## **Self-care**

- Wash your hands frequently for more than 40 seconds with soap and water. Remember to wash the back of your hand and rub your palms together and wash with your fingers interlocked. Likewise, rub your thumbs and be sure to clean your fingertips with plenty of soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol or alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with your flexed elbow or a disposable tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after using it and wash your hands.
- Avoid physical contact, keeping a distance of at least 2 meters when talking with other people. Avoid approaching persons who have symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing and have been recently exposed to persons with these symptoms or in places where cases have been diagnosed, call the authorized numbers in the country where you are to report your health situation. Be sure to mention that you are a person living with HIV and the type of antiretroviral treatment (ART) you receive, requesting that due confidentiality is ensured about your identity.
- Due to the emergency, for epidemiological reasons and because it is a pandemic that must be known by the authorities, the community, local or national health services must know all the cases in order to offer health and protection recommendations, as well as indications on how to stay isolated.
- If you are sick, wear a medical mask (face or surgical mask) to avoid spreading the virus to others and stay isolated.
- Support your friends and neighbors, if physical distance measures are established. Use alternative mechanisms to continue social contact, such as phone calls, WhatsApp or social networks. Participate, wherever possible, in collaborative networks within your host community, for provision of food, medicine, child and pet care, etc.; always keeping self-protection and physical distance recommendations.
- Help your neighbors, especially if they are refugees and migrants, for accessing essential medicines for HIV or other health conditions, always keeping self-protection and physical distancing recommendations.

## **Reliable information**

- Please note that not everything that is said about COVID-19 is true. Stay informed through health personnel, Support Spaces staff, shelters and other service points for refugees and migrants.

- Prefer information from reliable sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UNAIDS or the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC).

## **Preparation**

- If you are taking antiretrovirals (ART), try to have enough treatment available, guaranteeing treatment for a minimum of 30 days and ideally for 3 months or more. Discuss this with your medicine supplier to follow the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines that recommend a multi-month of three months dispensing of medications for HIV and for other health conditions (such as diabetes, hypertension, tuberculosis, etc.).
- Not all countries have implemented policies to allow medicines supply for 3 months but mention it to your medicine supplier as soon as possible so they consider it.
- Have on hand the telephone numbers of health services, community organizations, NGOs, Support Spaces or care centers for refugees and migrants, where they can help you in case you have symptoms or need advice about your situation.
- Verify the existence of local networks for persons living with HIV and try to keep contact through electronic means.
- Make a plan of steps to follow in case of becoming infected with COVID-19 that includes: informing health authorities, informing local or community organizations that support refugees and migrants, informing your family and friends, following self-care and isolation recommendations.

## **Support the persons around you**

- The COVID-19 pandemic can cause fear and anxiety, especially to those who are far from their families or communities. It is normal that in the midst of this situation you are afraid and wish to connect with your loved ones.
- The communities of persons living with HIV have decades of experience in resilience, survival and can take advantage of their learning to support refugees and migrants during this crisis. Connect with existing networks in the city or country where you are. Always remember to follow self-protection recommendations.
- Pay special attention to your mental health:
  - Avoid excessive exposure to COVID-19 information, especially from unreliable sources.

- As much as possible, practice breathing exercises, try to eat healthy food and balanced meals, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, and avoid excessive consumption of substances such as alcohol and drugs. Do not forget to take your antiretrovirals.
- Connect with other persons through electronic means: share your concerns and how you feel with your family, neighbors or friends.

## **Know your rights**

- At this time racism, stigma and discrimination can be directed against groups of refugees and migrants if deemed that they could be carriers of diseases and especially COVID-19. Denounce these behaviors to the corresponding authorities in the country where you are: Ombudsmen, NGOs, etc.
- The COVID-19 pandemic can affect your workplace or access to livelihoods, as well as the possibility of receiving health and education services for yourself or your children, especially if social distancing measures are implemented in your community. Learn about your rights and seek help, while respecting the established rules in the place where you live in order to control the pandemic.

## **COVID-19 Treatment**

- COVID-19 Treatment is an active area of research and several randomized clinical studies are ongoing to determine if antiretroviral drugs used to treat HIV could be useful in treating COVID-19. Since those studies have not ended, it is too early to say whether antiretroviral drugs or other drugs are effective in treating COVID-19.

## **Contact**

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