



## COVID-19 Guidance for People Who Use Drugs

People who use drugs are at higher risk of getting, and being hospitalized and dying from, COVID-19 infection. Taking care of your health can be hard, especially if you have had negative experiences in health care settings. However, you should always voice your needs to your health care provider or visit a harm reduction provider to get appropriate services and referrals.

The following guidance and resources can help you choose the best way to stay safe from COVID-19. It can be overwhelming to try to avoid COVID-19, but the more steps you take, the more you can protect yourself from infection and serious illness.

### COVID-19 Prevention, Testing and Treatment

- Get vaccinated and boosted. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from serious illness and death related to COVID-19. To find a COVID-19 vaccination site near you, visit [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov) or call 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692).
- Wear a face mask during times of increased COVID-19 transmission and as recommended by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department), and in places where masks are required.
- Practice healthy hand hygiene. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Sneeze or cough into a tissue or your sleeve instead of your hands. Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - If you need soap or hand sanitizer, contact your local syringe service program (SSP), medical clinic or drop-in center. To find an SSP near you, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://nyc.gov/health) and search for **syringe service programs**.
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or were recently exposed. Avoid close contact with others, even if you do not have symptoms.
  - Use the COVID-19 Isolation and Exposure Guidance Tool (available at [a816-health.nyc.gov/covid19help](https://a816-health.nyc.gov/covid19help)) to find out what to do if you have been exposed to or tested positive for COVID-19.
  - To find an NYC Health + Hospitals Test & Treat site, visit [nyc.gov/covidtest](https://nyc.gov/covidtest), or call 212-COVID19 (212-268-4319) or **311**.
  - Visit the federal Test to Treat locator at [aspr.hhs.gov/TestToTreat](https://aspr.hhs.gov/TestToTreat).
  - If you **test positive** for COVID-19:
    - Separate from others and isolate (stay home) right away for at least five days after you first had symptoms or a positive test (if you have no symptoms).
    - You can leave home after five days if your symptoms did not include shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, your overall illness has improved, and you have not had a fever in the last 24 hours without taking medicine.

- Ask your health care provider about treatment options. If you do not have a provider, call **311**.
- Find resources to help you cope. COVID-19 can make you feel overwhelmed, but there are resources that can help (such as emotional support apps) and services to connect you with trained professionals.
  - For support and resources related to drug use, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text “WELL” to 65173 or chat online at [nyc.gov/nycwell](https://nyc.gov/nycwell). NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide free brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages.

### **COVID-19 Vaccination**

- Getting vaccinated reduces your own and your loved ones’ risk of getting or becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.
- Side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines last about one to two days and may be annoying. However, symptoms and complications from COVID-19 infection are usually much worse and last longer, especially if you have not been vaccinated.
  - Many people who get COVID-19 completely recover, but some have symptoms that last a long time.
  - Post-COVID-19 conditions, also called long COVID, refer to symptoms that continue for weeks or months after an initial COVID-19 infection. These symptoms may include fatigue, trouble breathing, muscle pain and difficulty remembering or focusing.
- The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. They do not change your DNA or contain the virus that causes COVID-19. They teach our cells to recognize the virus that causes COVID-19, which allows our immune system to fight it.
- Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is especially important for Black and Hispanic New Yorkers, who have had higher rates of COVID-19-related infection, hospitalization and death. These outcomes, in addition to medical conditions that can make COVID-19 more severe (including diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure), are the result of structural racism.

### **Tips for Safer Drug Use**

- Prepare your drugs yourself.
- Create an overdose safety plan. Consider the drugs you are using, where you are using them and if someone will be available to help you if necessary. Share your plan with someone you trust who knows where and when you will be using drugs.
- Avoid using drugs alone. Maintain physical distance from people you are with or wear a mask if you were recently exposed to or have symptoms of COVID-19. If you do use alone, call the Never Use Alone hotline at 800-484-3731 before using so someone can monitor you over the phone.
- Carry naloxone. Naloxone is a safe medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.
  - Fentanyl is in the NYC drug supply and increases the risk of opioid overdose. It is present in nearly all drugs sold as heroin. It also has been found in cocaine, crack,

methamphetamine, ketamine and pills from nonmedical sources.

- If you inject drugs:
  - Wash your hands first and clean the area where you plan to inject.
  - Avoid sharing syringes and drug use equipment with others, including water.
  - If you do share or reuse syringes or other drug use equipment, rinse them with cold water first, bleach second, then water again.
    - Fill your syringe with bleach. Leave the bleach in the barrel for at least 30 seconds. Rinse the barrel thoroughly by flushing it out three times with clean water.
  - Prepare and administer your own injection, if possible.
  - Do not lick your needle.
- If you use pipes, bongs, straws or e-cigarettes:
  - Avoid sharing them with others.
  - Wipe down any parts that touch your lips, nose or hands with an alcohol swab after every use.
- Keep extra supplies, such as bandages, hand sanitizer and alcohol pads, in case you run out.

### **Medicine for Opioid Use Disorder**

- If you take medicine for opioid use disorder, such as methadone or buprenorphine, talk to your treatment provider about options for telemedicine appointments and take-home medicine.
  - For more information about options for medicine for opioid use disorder, visit [nyc.gov/health/addictiontreatment](https://nyc.gov/health/addictiontreatment).

### **Resources**

- For more information on COVID-19, visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus). To receive COVID-19 alerts, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.
- SSPs provide sterile drug equipment and services, including overdose prevention, safer use counseling, case management and referrals to other health care. Contact your local SSP to find out which services they provide.
- To find naloxone near you, call **311**, visit [nyc.gov/health/naloxone](https://nyc.gov/health/naloxone), or contact your local community-based program or pharmacy.
- The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports educates individuals and families about substance use. To find treatment options near you, visit [webapps.oasas.ny.gov/providerdirectory](https://webapps.oasas.ny.gov/providerdirectory).

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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