

Intersection of Stigma and Fear: Issues for Persons Living with HIV in the Age of COVID-19

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
Wednesday, July 8, 2020
9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Central Time**

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division

Faculty

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Goal of the Training

The course goal is to increase understanding of and the ability of care providers to respond to the needs of persons living with HIV in the age of COVID-19.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this training, participants will be able to:

- 1. List at least four stressors unique to individuals with HIV in the age of COVID-19;**
- 2. Identify at least three emotional issues that are a result of experiencing stigma;**
- 3. List at least three impacts of stigma on health care and health seeking; and**
- 4. Name at least four strategies to address needs of persons with HIV in the age of COVID-19**

Brief COVID-19 Update

Surveillance Data (July 1)

- 2,2624,029 cases (July 1)
43,644 daily new cases (June 30)**
- 127,299 deaths
560 deaths (June 30)**
- Increasing case rates
–FL, GA, AZ, OK, NV, MS, SC, MI, TX**
- Lowering case rates
–IA, PA, MA, MD, IL, DC, VA, NY**

COVID-19 Updates

- Increased 'opening up', especially southern and southwestern states
- States moving back on re-opening
- Global explosion in Brazil, U.S., Russia, India, Iran
- Politization of the COVID-19 response
- Impact of pandemic on behavioral health

QUESTIONS/Comments:

alphnquestions@adph.state.al.us

Medical Facts for PLWH

Risk for PLWH

- Most estimates are that individuals with well-controlled HIV have no higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and survival rates are at least as good as the general population.
- Higher mortality for persons not virally suppressed and CD4 count <200.
- 40% of diagnosed PLWH are not virally suppressed; nearly 15% of the population of PLWH are not aware of their status and not in care.
- Nearly 50% of PLWH are over 50; age is the most likely variable of risk.

COVID-19 Transmission

- Transmitted from *person-to-person* by respiratory droplets spread through coughs and sneezes – protective measure of mask wearing.
- Virus gets into the body through your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - *Rationale for avoiding touching our faces.*
- The virus can travel deep down into the lungs, and then the immune response is actually out of control.
 - *people can actually start to develop pneumonia, severe lung disease, lung failure*
- If it spreads, you can have organ damage all over your body, and could go into shock.

Go to the Emergency Room:

- If you feel*:
 - Short of breath (SOB)
 - Have persistent pain or pressure in your chest
 - New confusion or inability to wake up
 - Bluish lips or face
 - If you have tested positive for COVID-19 and suddenly start to feel SOB

Go to the Emergency Room immediately

- If your current symptoms would not have made you go to ER in the past, it probably should be managed the same way

*This list is not all inclusive. Contact your HCP for further advice.

PLWH and COVID-19 Prevention

Hand Washing

Physical Distancing

Wear Mask in public

Self-Isolation

Plus...healthy lifestyle choices

Update for PLWH

- As states begin to open, we must still exercise precautions.
 - The virus and threat of infection has NOT gone away
- Particularly for PLWH whose virus is poorly controlled, detectable, or who have fallen out of care
- Continue to use infection control guidelines!

*Case Managers/Care Providers: Monitor viral load and link them to COVID-19 Risk

*Patients: Seek support and get back in care!

Psychosocial Issues: Revisiting STIGMA

Stigma Defined

Stigma is a pervasive social process: individuals with socially undesirable attributes or identities are seen as having lower social value than are others and as a consequence face prejudice and discrimination.

- Turan (2017)

Voices of PLWHIV: Long-Term Survivors Speak

- How can we support the long-time survivors among us who in some cases are starting to encounter PTSD like feelings from the early days of the epidemic?
- I am living w/HIV + COVID19. it has been horrible. I did not think I was at risk until I got sick. Can you all please address more stigma?
- I am a LTS. I am deeply concerned. How do we as LTS make it through? It is double the stigma.

Targets of Stigma

- Racial/Ethnic background
- Poverty
- Disease
- Sexual orientation
- Gender Identity
- Level of education
- Immigration status
- Any other characteristic viewed as a sign of flawed/inferior character

Targets of Stigma and COVID-19

- In the age of COVID-19
 - Stigma for Asians/Asian-Americans
 - Stigma for urban Americans
 - Poorer outcomes for POC who contract COVID-19
 - Stigma for essential workers
 - Stigma associated with stimulus funds

AND...flashbacks to early HIV experiences

Impact of Stigma: Thoughts and Beliefs

I'm a failure.

I'm not important.

I'm unlovable.

I don't deserve to be happy.

I'm a bad person.

I'm a phony.

I'm defective.

Intersectional Stigma

“...the tendency for PLWH to simultaneously experience stigma and discrimination because of HIV and other aspects of their identities, such as their race, economic situation, or sexual orientation.”

- Logie (2013)

Impact on Health Care and Health Seeking

- Poorer self-concept may leave patients overly sensitive to criticism
- History of shame/stigma increases possibility of mental health/substance use challenges
- History of trauma may lead to distrust of authority
- Systems that aren't trauma-informed may actually re-injure survivors

Guidance to PLWHIV

During this time, you may be experiencing:

- Increased anxiety/stress
- Checking for symptoms, in yourself, or others
- Becoming irritable more easily; feeling insecure or unsettled
- Fearing that normal allergies and coughs might be the COVID-19
- Experiencing sadness, helplessness, lack of control, or difficulty with concentration

Managing Anxiety

- This is a frightening time for all of us. Fear is a normal reaction.
- Flashbacks of our early HIV experiences are happening to LOTS of us!
- Most of us will NOT contract COVID-19. Of people who contract, the risk of dying is likely >3%.
- There are steps we can take to protect ourselves. We deserve protecting!
- We WILL survive.

Managing Grief

- Know you may be experiencing a kind of collective grief.
- Feel your feelings.
- Talk, tears, time are part of the solution.
- Recognize the course of grief is unique and unpredictable.
- Know that grief sometimes allows old grief to emerge.
- Be gentle with yourself and practice self-care.

Resilience and Stigma

- I can adapt when changes occur.
- I can deal with whatever comes my way.
- I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems.
- Having to cope with stress can make me stronger.
- I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships.

Resilience and Stigma

- I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles.
- Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly.
- I am not easily discouraged by failure.
- I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties.
- I can handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger.

Questions?

Comments?

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alphtnquestions@adph.state.al.us

Practical Tips for PLWHIV

Sexual Health

“We would strongly recommend sexually active persons be very selective in their sexual partnerships, pay attention to partners’ health, and limit new partnerships to the fewest possible. The lowest sexual risk, of course, will exist for mutually monogamous couples.”

-H. Hunter Handsfield
American Sexual Health Association

Sexual Risk

- COVID-19 can be spread from a person who has it:
 - Symptomatic, asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic
 - Respiratory droplets, mucus and feces

Advice on Sexual Health

- It is not recommended that you have sex with anyone outside of your home who you can't verify has been physical distancing.
- If you are someone who typically meets partners online, it is advised that maybe you take a break from in person dates.

Safest Sex in the Age of COVID-19



Second Safest Partner

- Monogamous relationship partner who is physically distancing with you
- Semi-monogamous relationship with partner who is not monogamous but taking all precautions (barriers for oral sex, removing outside clothing, showers before and after)
- Partners that sleep in the same bed will likely infect one another – sex or not.
- Someone else who lives with you who you know is physically distancing

Sexual Precautions

- Assure that your partner isn't exhibiting symptoms
- Don't share sex toys
- Limit droplets in the air by wearing masks
- Sexual positions that place faces away from each other
- Understand that transmission involves feces or respiratory droplets getting into your mouth.
- Be sure to wash both your hands and body when done.

U.S. DHHS Guidance for PLWH

- Maintain on-hand at least a 30-day supply – and ideally a 90-day supply – of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs and other medications.
- Talk to your pharmacists and/or healthcare providers about 90-day supply approval and/or changing to mail order delivery of medications when possible.
- If a regimen switch is planned, make sure close follow-up and monitoring are possible.
- Additional caution for all persons with HIV, especially those with advanced HIV or poorly controlled HIV, is warranted.

Guidance for PLWH

- Talk to your health care provider and make sure all your vaccinations are up-to-date, including **vaccinations against seasonal influenza** and bacterial pneumonia because these vaccine preventable diseases disproportionately affect people with HIV.
- Establish a plan for clinical care if you have to stay at home for a couple of weeks. Try to establish a telemedicine link through your HIV care provider's online portal.

Guidance for PLWH

- Make sure you can maintain a social network remotely, such as online, by phone, or by video chat. This can help you stay socially connected and mentally healthy, which is especially important for people with HIV.

More Practical Advice

Keep a current list of:

- All medications, both for HIV and other conditions
- Contact information for all your healthcare providers
- Contact information for your loved ones and anyone that should be contacted if you need to be hospitalized
- Put it in your phone and in your wallet

If Hospitalized...

- Continue your HIV medications
- Make sure you and loved ones advocate for continuing your ARVs in hospital
- **THIS IS ESSENTIAL as many physicians discontinue ARVs in hospital.**

Questions?

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THANKS SO MUCH...

AL Wise Woman Program

PWLHIV

My friends at ADPH

Rhonda, Bill, Ryan, Brandon, and Darren

YOU for making time today – and ALL YOU DO!