



Department of Health

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September 2022

Re: COVID-19 Vaccination and Treatment for Patients With HIV

Dear Colleague:

The AIDS Institute's Office of the Medical Director carefully monitors COVID-19 and its impact on people living with HIV. My office is deeply committed to making sure we share the latest developments in science and public health recommendations.

With this in mind, I want to take a moment to share three important messages with you.

- 1) All people with HIV are advised to get the full COVID-19 mRNA vaccines series, including the new bivalent vaccine that also protects against the Omicron variants. This will afford you a high level of protection from COVID-19 infection and illness.
- 2) Treatment for COVID-19 and its variants is now available if you do develop COVID-19 infection with mild or moderate symptoms. The name of the oral medication is nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid).
- 3) If you need treatment for COVID-19, you should continue taking your HIV treatment regimen, unless your health care provider specifically changes your treatment regimen.

The attached Fact Sheet provides more information about each of these messages.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over but we do now have effective vaccines and treatment.

In health,

Charles John Gonzalez, M.D.
Medical Director
AIDS Institute

What People Living with HIV Should Know About COVID-19 Vaccination and Treatment

New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute

Get Four Doses of the COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine

COVID-19 vaccination is important for everyone, but is especially important if you are a person who is living with HIV (PLWH). PLWH have a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. It is strongly recommended that PLWH get the full COVID-19 mRNA vaccines series, including the new bivalent vaccine that also protects against the Omicron variants to have the best possible protection. You may hear people talk about getting vaccinated twice and getting two boosters. The important point is that you will get the best level of protection from a total of four doses of vaccine, spaced apart as recommended by your health care provider.

Treatment for COVID-19 is Available if You Develop Mild to Moderate Symptoms from COVID-19

Despite the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, breakthrough infections and new variants pose a risk even for people who have been fully vaccinated and boosted. The good news is that there is now treatment available if you develop mild-to-moderate symptoms of COVID-19 or other variants.

Act Fast if You Develop COVID-19 Infection

Mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms can be treated by taking a pill called **nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid)**. The medication must be prescribed by a health care provider and started within 5 days of the first symptoms of COVID-19. The health care provider will talk with you to determine if the medication is right for you. To be eligible for this medication, you must be over age 12 and weigh more than 88 pounds. Your health care provider will order lab tests to monitor your kidney functioning. They may adjust the amount of medication you are given based on the lab results. It is important to discuss all medications and herbs you are taking with your healthcare provider if they are considering giving you this medication.

Keep Taking your HIV Treatment if you are Prescribed nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid)

You may recognize the word ritonavir in the name of the medication that is used to treat COVID-19. That is because some PLWH have ritonavir in their current HIV treatment regimen or a past treatment regimen. If you need to be treated for COVID-19, be sure to talk with your health care provider about your current HIV treatment regimen. In almost all cases, PLWH should continue to take their HIV medication while taking nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid) to treat symptoms of COVID-19.

SUMMARY: COVID-19 is still a concern, but vaccines and treatment can protect PLWH from serious illness from COVID-19 or one of its variants

Four doses of COVID vaccine are your first level of protection. If you are vaccinated and still get infected and sick from COVID-19, treatment is available to prevent serious disease and hospitalization.

For more information, please email us at hivet@health.ny.gov