

# Get the Facts About **COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)**

## For People Who Use Substances, Family Members & Concerned Significant Others

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a coronavirus causing serious respiratory infection, and currently has no cure or treatment. Quite simply, the body's immune system fights the disease in much the same way that it fights the flu.

### What are the Signs & Symptoms?

COVID-19 can cause fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These are similar symptoms of withdrawal from substances. This virus is spread through human contact, much like the cold or flu. There is not yet a vaccine or medication approved to treat it.

### How Does Substance Use Increase Risk for Complications from COVID-19?

People with substance use disorders (SUD) have weaker immune systems causing them to be at higher risk for complications from COVID-19. The National Institute on Drug Abuse ([NIDA](#)) suspects it could hit some populations with SUDs particularly hard.

Because it attacks the lungs, COVID-19 could be an especially serious threat to those who smoke tobacco or marijuana, or other drugs such as crack cocaine or vape substances. For help stopping nicotine use, [the PA Free Quitline \(1-800-QUIT-NOW\)](#) is a telephone-based tobacco cessation counseling service offering free coaching, with no judgment. This program has a proven record of increasing your chances of staying smoke free for good.

Click <https://pa.quitlogix.org/en-US/Enroll-Now>

People with alcohol use disorder, opioid use disorder and cocaine, and methamphetamine use disorders may also be vulnerable due to those drugs' effects on respiratory and pulmonary health. Also, use of multiple substances (polydrug use) risks drug interactions and potential overdose.

Additionally, individuals with SUD are more likely to experience homelessness or incarceration than those in the general population, and these circumstances pose unique challenges regarding transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

## Free App to Support People in Recovery During COVID-19 Outbreak

Social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation, especially for those in recovery from addiction who rely on supportive networks as part of the healing process. To assist those in recovery, Policy Forum has joined with [CHESS Health](#) to launch the [Connections App](#), a free smartphone app, scientifically proven to support those in recovery by reducing relapse and promoting pro-social engagement.

# Minimizing the Risk of COVID-19 Infection

## For People Who Use Substances, Family Members & Concerned Significant Others

The Centers for Disease Control ([CDC](#)) recommends basic hygiene. Wash your hands regularly. Use soap and water and wash for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing, before eating, after using the bathroom, and after touching common surfaces. Sanitize commonly used surfaces. Don't touch your face. Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Avoid contact with people who are infected.

To reduce the spread of infection, practice safer drug use, keep yourself & space clean, and stock up on supplies including naloxone (Narcan). Contact your medical team or provider to see what services are available regarding how to access your methadone or buprenorphine treatment.

Here are four ideas for practicing safer drug use and overdose prevention.

### Practice Safer Drug Use & Overdose Prevention

- **DON'T SHARE SUPPLIES:** Don't share e-cigs, pipes, drinks, bongs or joints, or spoons, nasal tubes such as straws. If you have (wipe down the mouth pieces with an alcohol swab or alcohol-based cleaner (like Purell) before sharing or use separate mouthpieces). Wipe down drug packages. Put used smoking, snorting, and injecting equipment in a bio-bucket so people know they are used. If you don't have one, use a plastic laundry bottle with a lid and label it as "SHARPS CONTAINER."
- **MINIMIZE CONTACT:** If you are having sex or engaging in sex work, COVID-19 can be transmitted by close contact like coughing, kissing, or direct contact with body fluids. Try to minimize sexual contact and to ensure condom use.
- **PREPARE FOR INVOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL:** Be sure you purchase and stock up on medications you may need as well as food and drinks heavy in electrolytes to help you detox safely. Make sure to stay hydrated. Talk with a medical provider about medications that could help with withdrawal. Right now, put the number for **UPMC Altoona Crisis** on speed dial, just in case you need to talk, or need help.
- **PLAN & PREPARE FOR OVERDOSE (OD):** Emergency services might be stretched in a COVID-19 outbreak, and slow to respond to 911 calls. Load up on naloxone and fentanyl testing strips. Avoid using and injecting alone. If you are alone, experiment with using less to lower your risk of OD and go slowly. If you are using with others, prepare your drugs yourself, make an OD plan with others and stagger use if possible. Store a breathing mask for use in case rescue breathing is needed.

How can I prevent spread of the infection?

How can I reduce harm to myself or family member who is challenged by a Substance Use Disorder?

What if I begin going into withdrawal?

Contact **UPMC Altoona**  
Crisis Services  
Call the hotline for 24-hour crisis help at:  
**814-889-2141**  
**Option 1.**