



An easy-to-follow resource for LGBTIQ persons in Sri Lanka, on COVID-19!



BASIC INFORMATION

1. What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

2. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

3. What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19: **fever, tiredness, and dry cough**. Some patients may have **aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea**. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. **Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell.**

4. What happens when you are infected with COVID-19?

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

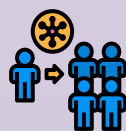
5. How does it spread? FROM PERSON TO PERSON!

- The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales
- These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person
- Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth
- People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets

6. How can we protect ourselves?



Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands, wash them with soap and water (take 20 seconds each time)



Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and another person, especially if they are coughing or sneezing. Practice 'social-distancing'!



Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth – Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.



If you can, stay home! Especially if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.



Avoid traveling to places and avoid crowds, if possible, especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart or lung disease, or you come into contact with anyone who is elderly or has any of the above-mentioned conditions.



Keep up to date with local, verified information



FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

People living with HIV may have a weakened immune system and so should take extra care.

If you are on HIV treatment with a CD4 count over 350 and an undetectable viral load, you are not considered to have a weakened immune system, BUT if your CD4 count is less than 350, if you're not on HIV treatment or if you have a detectable viral load, then it is very important that you follow the guidance on social distancing.



1. If you are taking medication, stock up!

Visit your doctor or clinic now and ask for a stock for at least a couple of months, so you can stay home over the coming weeks without worry, even if things shut down. Don't stockpile unnecessarily, but do this with your doctor's advice.



2. Being on antiviral medication does not protect you from COVID-19

There is no reliable evidence at this stage that HIV drugs are effective in treating COVID-19. Being on antiviral medication for HIV (including PrEP), hepatitis C or hepatitis B, has not been shown to provide protection from COVID-19.

ON CHEST- BINDING



- If you have a cough, avoid binding; it can lead to a fluid build-up in the lungs. Pneumonia is a complication associated with COVID-19
- If you are sick and have to avoid binding, consider putting on worn-in binders that can be worn sparingly, or fitting singlets or under-shirts
- Once you take your binder off, remember to cough. This helps loosen your upper body and expand your lungs!
- Stretch your upper-body frequently
- When possible, give yourself a total break from binding. Consider finding some time and space where you have some privacy, once a day, to do this and do some deep-breathing with no binder on
- Stretch and face forward / lean forward slightly when coughing so you don't hurt your back!



SAFE SEX AND INTIMACY

There is no data yet to show that COVID-19 can be sexually transmitted (WHO), but we know it can be passed to us through droplets from the mouth or nose of an infected person, through closeness and proximity.

We are being asked to avoid travel, avoid crowds, avoid public places and practice 'social distancing', so this will have an impact on dating, relationships, and transactional sex.

- **Practice safe-sex nonetheless! This is very important at all times.**
- Since we are being asked to practice 'social distancing' in the coming weeks, take a break from in-person dating and intimacy and seek communication through secure online modes
- Talk with your partner/s over the phone, and use video chat (platforms like Signal and Wire are more secure than WhatsApp, and also free)
- You should only use a secure messaging/calling app for sharing intimate photos or videos (Avoid Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp)
- If you are sharing intimate photos or videos, crop your face out / try and angle the camera so your face is not seen
- **For those engaged in in-person sex-work:** This is undoubtedly a difficult time for you financially. There is no safe way to mitigate the impact COVID-19 is having on your livelihood. Try and talk to others who are engaged in the same work about online options.
- If you are considering online sex-work, please ensure you speak with others who have experience, about your safety and security, or seek out community support.

SAFETY DURING CURFEW



Some of us may live with abusive family members or intimate partners. Being forced to stay at home can be especially difficult for those of us who are not safe at 'home'. If you can, seek a safe place (e.g. a friend's house) to stay for a short while. If you are unable to do so, take some simple steps:

- Let trusted friends know of your situation and that you are worried for your safety
- Keep anything which could be used as a weapon (e.g knives) locked away or out of reach as much as possible
- If you have children, and someone in your house is abusive towards you, avoid running to where the children are during any altercation
- If violence is unavoidable, try and protect your head and face with your arms
- Do not wear scarves or long jewellery (such as dangling earrings) while in the house
- Identify areas of the house where you could go to during an incident of violence (e.g. go into bathroom and lock door)
- Keep your phone on you and save some numbers as Emergency Dial numbers.

It is very important to adhere to government-declared curfews strictly! Do not violate curfew, or you risk being taken into custody. Being taken into custody can be very dangerous for LGBTIQ persons.



COMMUNITY AND WELL-BEING

- This period is going to be exceptionally financially difficult for those of us who depend on daily or weekly wages or are freelancers etc.; try and rely on community support (share and pool resources) and make living arrangements with people you trust
- We may be feeling isolated and disconnected since we are all being asked to stay at home; try and connect with your friends daily on calls and video chats
- If you need to meet, don't meet in large groups, and try to avoid going to an indoor public place; meet in an outdoor place, like a park, and meet in small groups of not more than 2-3 people at a time
- Don't hug or kiss your friends at this time! Get creative with non-physical greetings
- You may live in a small space with several other people, where it is hard to 'self-isolate' or practice 'social-distancing'. Practice good hygiene and encourage your house-mates to do the same. Clean your space regularly. To whatever extent possible, make sure you all limit your exposure to other people outside your home.



WHO TO CALL

Community Welfare and Development Fund is an emergency relief mechanism for LGBTIQ community-members. **Call 0774 719137** in case of an emergency. Cases will be vetted on a case-by-case basis.

(You can also donate to CWDF, please call to find out more. Every donation will go towards supporting a vulnerable LGBTIQ person in crisis!)

Community Crisis Response Team LK can help with delivering goods and rations to vulnerable persons, especially daily-wage earners etc. (except during curfew). **Call 0777 346334 / 0770 062977**

For LGBTIQ-friendly counselling

Call **Shanti Margam: 0717 639898** (8 AM - 8 PM)

For crisis-support call CCC on **1333**

For sexual health, HIV and STD-related support,

call **Know4Sure** (National STD/AIDS Control Program)

0766 447873, www.know4sure.lk; or search for Know4Sure on Facebook!

LOCAL HEALTH INFORMATION

You can call **1999** for **Government COVID Response Alert**

You can call **Suwaseriya** on **0710 107 107** over 24 hours for any COVID-19 related information

Visit the **Epidemiology Unit** of the Government of Sri Lanka online for resources on home-quarantining and more: **www.epid.gov.lk**

The Health Promotion Bureau also has information: **<http://hpb.health.gov.lk>**

[With content from the World Health Organization, The National Association for People with HIV in Australia, HIV Scotland and @queerhealthcollabs, Women's Aid Org Malaysia and National Domestic Violence Hotline USA]