

COVID-19 vaccinations and people living with HIV

Information about where, how and when people can be vaccinated changes so it is important to stay up to date. If you have questions, talk to your GP or HIV clinician, read the facts about COVID-19 vaccinations and check the information and links provided below.

- People living with HIV are eligible to be vaccinated in Phase 1b (if they are not covered in phase 1a), as people with an underlying health condition which includes HIV. Please ask your GP or HIV clinician about vaccinations. <https://bit.ly/33rKCUr>
- Positive Life NSW offers information and support to all people living with HIV in NSW about the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination process. Visit their website to see how to book <https://bit.ly/3c9DxN6>; to read COVID-19 vaccine Frequent Asked Questions <https://bit.ly/3ts5AwU> or view a video presentation from a recent community forum "In The Know: Living with HIV and the COVID-19 vaccine" <https://bit.ly/2SEZIZW>
- The National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA) website includes recent videos about COVID-19 vaccinations for people with HIV <https://napwha.org.au/covid-19-vaccine/>
- You can also read information on COVID-19 vaccination on NSW Health website: <https://bit.ly/3tvTQJS>

Have COVID vaccines been tested in people with HIV?

<https://bit.ly/3sonRej>

In this article the British HIV Association states:

"There is no reason to think these vaccines will be less safe for people with HIV," say the British HIV Association (BHIVA). "Both include some of the genetic material from SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) but not the whole virus. This means they are not live vaccines and so are no less safe in people with damaged immune systems."

Their statement referred specifically to the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines, but this is also the case for almost all COVID-19 vaccines being tested.

I'm living with HIV and have had the COVID vaccine.

<https://bit.ly/3aQW6Ft>

This is the story of a man with HIV in the UK who was part of a COVID vaccine trial.

COVID vaccines will be recommended to almost all Australians. But are there people who can't be immunised?

<https://ab.co/3svnvmp>

This article by ABC Health and Wellbeing provides information in response to this question.

I am not eligible for a Medicare card.

Can I get vaccinated?

Yes. All adults living in Australia are eligible for a free vaccine. The vaccine will be rolled out in stages. More information about this is available on the NSW Health website (see page 1).

If you are able to enrol in Medicare you will need to do this before you get vaccinated. If you cannot enrol in Medicare, you will need an Individual Health Identifier which you can apply for at <http://bit.ly/3sfr1la>. You will need to attend a state or territory vaccination clinic or a GP Respiratory Clinic for your vaccination.

What COVID-19 has meant for other sexual health and general health services: a global perspective

As we know, the pandemic has had a major impact on how we all live, work, learn and interact. COVID-19 impacts individuals, communities and organisations around the globe, and has had a particular impact on how health care and related services are now provided. While COVID-19 remains a top priority, there have been significant interruptions in the delivery of other health services, impacting testing, diagnoses and treatments.

The flow-on-effect of lowered numbers in testing and diagnoses of health conditions – such as HIV – impacts treatment and management strategies nationally and globally; For instance, due to the disruption of antiretroviral therapy, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated it could lead to more than 500,000 AIDS-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020-2021 (WHO, 2020). In many communities around the world, lockdown restrictions and breaks in medicine supply chains have highlighted the significance of maintaining an effective HIV response throughout the pandemic. Australia's national response to HIV has been reworked to adapt to the changing environment, with new considerations for Telehealth expansions, physical distancing, accessibility to PrEP and HIV treatment, and the provision of emotional support (Traeger et al., 2021).

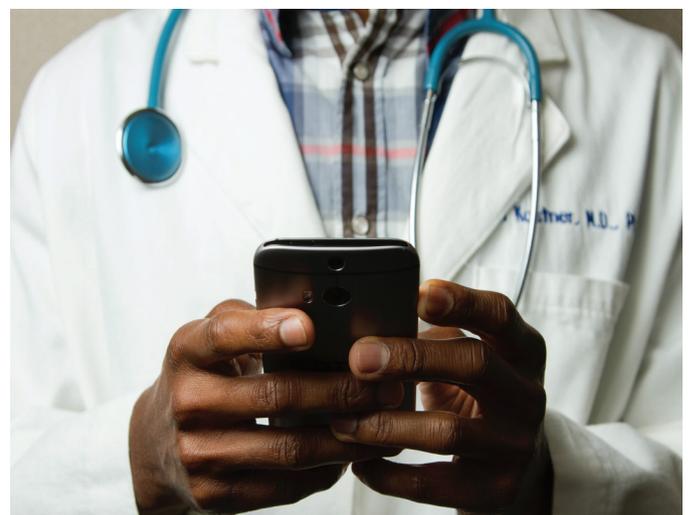
The changes in service delivery during the pandemic has also sparked innovative projects:

For instance in the UK, COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for HIV and Hepatitis C testing and treatment for homeless people who had been provided with accommodation in hotels so they could remain safe. By May 2020, 362 individuals had been screened for HIV and hepatitis. Four people who had already been diagnosed with HIV and were no longer taking their treatment were started on treatment and linked to peer services. Twenty-two people were diagnosed with hepatitis C

and commenced on treatment and linked to peer services. A great outcome for a group of people who were not usually engaged with health services.

While we're focusing on the positives, it is also important to highlight the increased flexibility and accessibility of health care due to Telehealth and other digital health services. This means more clients are able to receive essential care, such as people with HIV in rural communities.

It is safe to say, 2020 has been a whirlwind which has changed the way we all live, interact and receive health care. The pandemic has encouraged organisations to be innovative and responsive, and for clients and patients to be flexible and adaptive. As we all continue to live in this 'new normal', it is essential to continue to highlight the positive impacts of 2020, and how this has sparked innovation for reworking the HIV response, locally and globally.



Couscous and chickpea salad



Here is an easy to make recipe that Peter the Pozhet website worker makes regularly. Have a try!

If you have a recipe which you would like to share with other Pozhet service users. Send it to Pozhet and we will try to put it in the next newsletter.

- 1 tin brown lentils rinsed and drained well
- 1 tin chickpeas rinsed and drained well
- ¼ cup couscous
- ½ cup diced red capsicum
- 1 cucumber seeded and diced
- ½ cup diced red onion
- 1 tsp stock powder
- parsley chopped
- extra virgin olive oil

Add stock powder to couscous, add 1 tsp olive oil then add ¼ cup boiling water, stir and cover with clean tea towel, allow to cool then fluff with a fork.

Add all ingredients to a bowl, combine, and add extra olive oil and cracked black pepper to taste. Serve chilled with lemon wedge.

Keeps for another day in airtight container in the fridge.

Quiz

1. What song has the following lyrics:
"Suddenly I'm not half the man I used to be. There's a shadow hanging over me."?
2. What is the name of the band with the following members:
John Deacon, Brian May, Freddie Mercury, Roger Taylor?
3. How many hearts does an Octopus have?
4. What was the world-wide pandemic which happened between 1918 -1920?
5. Name Irvine Welsh's best-selling 1993 novel about heroin use and a group of working class friends in Edinburgh, Scotland?
6. What is the only internal human organ capable of natural regeneration of lost tissue?
7. What was the first country in the world to give women the vote?

Heterosexuals are included in the new HIV strategy

The new NSW HIV strategy has been published and is available on the NSW Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au. This document guides the NSW-wide response to HIV.

Although HIV diagnoses decreased in NSW residents by 19% over the previous 5 years up to 2019, rates for heterosexuals did not decline. This strategy highlights significant facts about HIV and heterosexuals, including that:

- The estimated proportion of people with HIV who have not been diagnosed is substantially higher among heterosexuals than among gay and bisexual men.
- 2019 also saw an increase of 15% in late diagnoses for heterosexuals born overseas.

This strategy committed to a renewed focus on heterosexuals at risk, including male and female partners of men who have sex with men and people who travel to and from high risk countries. We can reduce the number of preventable HIV infections by ensuring that heterosexuals who travel overseas and their GPs have knowledge about, and can discuss PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis).

As community members and health workers have stated for a long time, we need to address the barriers created by stigma if HIV rates are going to reduce for all population groups. Reducing stigma is one of the 4 goals of the strategy and will be considered in the development of all communication and health promotion strategies. Strategy Initiatives will include stigma awareness campaigns.

Let's hope that by 2025, rates of HIV among heterosexuals will be dramatically reduced! Together we can work towards the virtual elimination of HIV transmission and support everyone living with HIV.

Pozhet in 2020



2020 was a year no one will forget! COVID-19 meant that many people felt isolated and worried about their health. Health services were reduced so many people living with HIV switched to online communication (Telehealth) with their health workers. Many Pozhet clients told us that they had enjoyed learning new skills and communicating with health workers online as well as joining group discussions by zoom. Of course some didn't like this as much and really missed the face-to-face human contact. Some reported that they were not able to do some of the treatment therapies they were used to. This included hydrotherapy and some exercise classes as well as in-person support groups. Some people lost jobs and income that usually helped them get by.

During 2020, Pozhet was unable to hold the planned retreats and other events. However we will continue to partner with other services such as Positive Life NSW to make sure that Pozhet clients can all stay connected and up-to-date with what is happening around HIV advances and COVID-19. Check the Pozhet website regularly and we will make sure any relevant services and activities are posted.

If you have any questions or want to talk to Pozhet you can contact us via the website www.pozhet.org.au or by emailing pozhet@pozhet.org.au.

How COVID affected me in 2020: A community member from Pozhet



COVID has not worried me much as life went on OK and I went out each day, mainly to my rock at Bronte cliffs. Was annoyed to stop work in April but started up again in August... back off again since Christmas as the northern beaches was closed down. Also was upset about missing hydrotherapy and still don't know when it starts up again and I really missed my church.as it.is not the same doing it on line.

ACON rang me during the lock-down asking if I was OK which was nice of them. I have started doing computer lessons again with Positive Life – this has been a real help as I am still illiterate when it comes the net and being on-line.

Great to hear from you
John

We have moved!

During 2020 Pozhet moved. This should not affect anyone as the website phone numbers and Facebook addresses all remain the same. The only thing that has changed is the postal address. You can find all contact details below.

Let us know if you have moved!

If you have changed your contact details, particularly your email address, please advise us so you continue to receive news items and the biannual newsletters.

You can change your details by emailing pozhet@pozhet.org.au and we will advise you that we have updated them.

Answers to Quiz

1. Yesterday
2. Queen
3. Three
4. The Spanish flu
5. Trainspotting
6. Liver
7. New Zealand in 1893