

Groundswell

Out of homelessness



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Advice for people using drugs

COVID-19 symptoms are a high temperature; a new, continuous cough and loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.

People who **use drugs** and have **weakened immune systems** or **underlying health issues** can be **more vulnerable** to the effects of this virus.

What can you do to protect yourself and others? Read this guide to find out.



Version 2: The information in this document is correct as of the **19/05/2020**.

General advice

- Be **prepared for services changing how they work and going online** (e.g. needle exchanges, drug treatment and detox programs). If you **do not have a phone** let your provider know as they may be able to help with one.
- Remember that people with compromised immune systems, lung diseases and other pre-existing conditions are more at risk of contracting COVID-19. **Help keep them safe by keeping yourself safe by following the information in this guide.**
- Now may be the time for you to consider **recovery options, always make sure you seek the advice of a professional first.** These places may help:
 - <https://smartrecovery.org.uk/>: online recovery meetings and call-back service
 - www.wearewithyou.org.uk: speak to drug and alcohol workers online
 - <https://ukna.org/> online recovery meetings and Helpline Tel: 0300 999 1212

Where can I get help?

- If you're staying in a hotel, hostel or other supported accommodation **ask a support worker, staff member or drugs workers** for advice.
- If you are rough sleeping speak to an **outreach worker** or a worker from a service you access.
- Approach your **local drug treatment service yourself (visit Talk to Frank to find your local service: www.talktofrank.com).**



Important information – appointments, pharmacies and prescriptions

- **Medical appointments:** GP and hospital appointments are now mostly being arranged as either a **phone or video call**.
- **Visits to the pharmacy:** Going to the pharmacy frequently could increase your risk of catching or spreading COVID-19, they are likely to be busy with long queues. **A prescriber might move you from a daily pick-up to a less regular plan, this may also be the case for supervised scripts – this is the prescribers decision.**
- **On a reduction plan:** It might be best to stop the reduction for a short time, as visits to the service might be reduced.
- **Collecting my script:** your prescription will still be sent to your usual pharmacy. You should carry on going to the pharmacy as normal, ensuring you stick to the Government's social distancing guidelines – remembers it's likely to be busier than normal. The pharmacist will tell you when your medicine supply is changing.
- **I can't or don't want to go out to my pharmacy:** contact the service you use or speak to your GP, they should try to make arrangements. Your prescriber may agree for someone else to collect your medication, they will have a specific process to approve this.
- **If you're not on a script but think you should be:** contact your GP or drug treatment service and ask for an assessment appointment; providers are reporting a shorter waiting time compared to usual.
- **If you are using opiates and want to come off them:** replacement medications such as Methadone or Buprenorphine will be available – seek the advice of a professional.
- **If you are feeling unwell and cannot get medication:** Let someone know as soon as possible - get a friend or family member to call if you need to. If it is more urgent call NHS 111 who will discuss your symptoms (please note they will be busier than usual) or in an emergency only call 999.

Staying safe and minimising harm during COVID-19

REMEMBER: mixing drugs makes them more dangerous; especially combined with alcohol consumption.

Managing supplies

- Make sure you have **enough syringes and injecting equipment** to last you for a couple of weeks; ask your supplier if they can provide them in bulk in person or via post.
- Try to **ration your supply** and not use more than you normally would, drug markets are highly disrupted due to COVID-19.
- Remember buying and selling drugs is illegal and still an arrestable offence.

Hygiene

- **Don't share** pipes, bongs, vapes, cigarettes/dogends or joints, nasal tubes or injecting equipment
- **Wipe down** packages with alcohol-based cleansers (a minimum 60% alcohol concentration kills the COVID-19 virus). If you don't have cleaning products ask staff (e.g. support or outreach worker), they may be able to give you some.
- **Do not put drug packages in your mouth, vagina or anus.** If you must carry it in your body, clean vigorously with an alcohol-based cleanser before and after.
- **Wash your hands** with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds before and after you come into contact with people, handle money and receiving drugs.
- **Prepare your drugs yourself;** don't touch other people's equipment or drugs and don't let them touch yours

Withdrawal

- The symptoms of COVID-19 can be similar to those of drug withdrawal (e.g. fever and cough)
- Getting supplies may be more difficult which could cause **involuntary withdrawal.**
- If you can, have a **backup plan** and make sure you have all the necessary medications, food, drinks and support systems in place – **seek the advice of a professional.**