Substance Use and COVID-19

The pandemic has raised questions and challenges for people who use alcohol and other drugs, those who are considering use, and those who are no longer using or are in recovery.

Safety and Harm Reduction Tips

Home isolation or quarantine
- When studying and working from home, stick with your usual schedules and norms about when it's OK and not OK to use. Keep yourself in a fit state to be successful.
- Plan meals and snacks ahead and buy healthy and nutritious food that nourish your body, your spirit and your immune system response.
- Avoid over-stocking alcohol or other substances at home; increasing availability can unintentionally increase your consumption and the consumption of others in your household.
- Don't assume that alcohol helps you to cope with stress. It is known to increase the symptoms of panic and anxiety disorders, depression and other mental disorders, and the risk of family and domestic violence. Explore other mental health approaches.

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Substance use - Alcohol & Other Drug Use
- If you don't use substances, consider staying on that track during this time.
- If you use substances, make mindful choices every time. Make a plan and stick to it.
- Learn and talk about the risks associated with substance use and COVID-19 (e.g. impaired judgement, violations of quarantine and physical distancing, underlying health conditions).
- Uphold community policies and agreements, including personal and social bubble commitments to keep risks as low as possible.
- Never mix alcohol with medications, even herbal or over-the-counter remedies, as this could make them less effective, or increase potency to a level where they become toxic and dangerous.
- Avoid bars, casinos, night clubs, restaurants and other, especially indoor, settings (including homes) where people gather to consume substances.

Alcohol or Other Substance Use Disorders are characterized by negative impact on self or others. If you, or a person close to you, struggles in relation to substance use, consider the following:
- The pandemic is a unique opportunity to try adjusting substance use (e.g. cut down, shift, quit) given enforced changes in social cues and peer pressure situations.
- Online interventions by professionals and mutual help groups can be less stigmatizing and offer greater anonymity and privacy.
- Create a buddy system with someone you trust and reach out for help if needed.
- Practice physical distancing, but do not socially isolate: call, text and write to friends, colleagues, neighbours and relatives.
- Limit exposure to substance use cues and triggers in media and social media where there's lots of marketing and promotion by the alcohol, cannabis and other substance industries.
- Try to maintain your daily routine - things you can control and which ground you – for instance, exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques.
COVID-19 Q&A For People Who Use Drugs

The following are considerations from the CDC, COVID-19 Q&A for People Who Use Drugs:

- It's not yet known if the occurrence of COVID-19 is higher for people who use drugs or have substance use disorders than for those who don't. Consuming alcohol will not destroy the virus, and its consumption is likely to increase the health risks if a person becomes infected with the virus.
- Bars, restaurants and other places (including homes) where people gather to consume alcohol and other substances, without physically distancing, increase the risk of transmission of the virus.
- Stay-at-home orders may lead to higher numbers of people using substances alone, without others around to intervene early, perform life-saving measures, or call for help in case of overdose. Use can increase during self-isolation; both isolation and use may also increase the risk of suicide.
- People may be afraid to seek medical attention for fear of infection. Bystanders to an overdose might be reluctant to administer naloxone or perform CPR or other life-saving measures because of fear of COVID-19 exposure.
- Alcohol is closely associated with violence, including intimate partner violence. Perpetrator violence is worsened by their alcohol consumption, while targets experiencing violence are likely to increase their alcohol use as a coping mechanism.
- The pandemic may result in disruptions to treatment and harm reduction services, leading to untreated substance use disorder or a return to substance use for people not currently using or in recovery.
- The illicit drug supply might be disrupted, or people might not be able to obtain drugs because of social distancing, potentially leading to risk of: withdrawal for people with physical dependence; contaminated drug products or people using drugs they are not used to, which might increase risk of overdose or other adverse reactions; and/or travel to obtain drugs which increase exposure to higher risk conditions for infection.

If you become infected, discuss your substance consumption with health personnel so they can make the most appropriate recommendations for you.

**these suggestions are relevant for almost everyone

Resources
Rely only on trusted sources as WHO, CDC, City of Berkeley, and UHS-Tang for ongoing information.

University Health Services (Tang Center)
- COVID-19 Information & Services
- Alcohol and Other Drug Information
- Alcohol and Other Drug Counselors
- Student Mental Health

City of Berkeley
- Health Officer’s Order/Guidelines

Centers for Disease Control
- COVID-19 Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing
- COVID-19 Questions and Answers: For People Who Use Drugs or Have Substance Use Disorder

World Health Organization
Alcohol and Covid-19 fact sheet

National Institute on Drug Abuse
COVID-19 Resources on Drug Abuse