



## **Impact of COVID-19 epidemic on San Francisco's HIV Community and Getting to Zero July 2020**

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on San Francisco's HIV community and on Getting to Zero goals and programs. San Francisco was an early responder to COVID, and on March 17, 2020, the city instituted a "shelter-in place" ordinance, which included a moratorium on routine medical care appointments. Thus far, San Francisco has experienced a much lower burden of COVID-19 than other major cities around the US, but like other regions in the state of California, recent diagnoses and hospitalizations are increasing.

Public health measures that are designed to reduce COVID-19 can affect HIV directly through a) alterations in care delivery that reduce care access leading to lower viral suppression; b) reductions in PrEP access; c) reductions in HIV testing access including at STD sites - reducing rapid ART starts. Indirect effects that can affect health-seeking behavior include less access to addiction support and services and mental health services. HIV positive individuals have experienced new onset or exacerbations of depression, isolation, and stigma as a result of COVID-19. Stark disparities in affected populations and the outcomes are present for both for COVID-19 and HIV.

We have an incomplete picture on what is happening in San Francisco, but this is what we know thus far:

1. HIV care models have transitioned to telehealth; and at San Francisco General Hospital, the public safety net hospital, viral suppression rates have decreased by 33% compared to pre-COVID-19. We know overall there is less viral load monitoring.
2. Health facility HIV testing is down 40% from pre-COVID levels, and testing is down 90% at community based organizations.
3. PrEP visits have been spaced out and alternate models such as home HIV testing are being used.
4. STD testing is limited to symptomatic screening; overall STD screening has been reduced by approximately 75%.

Getting to Zero recognizes that COVID-19 poses a serious threat to the health and livelihood of persons living with HIV and for those at risk for HIV. Moreover, with reductions in HIV testing, it will be difficult to assess trends in new HIV diagnoses over this calendar year.

### **What are some of San Francisco Getting to Zero's activities in response to COVID-19 in the community?**

We aim to maintain continuous communication with the SF community in real time as new information, opportunities and resources become available.

- Since early March, we post daily bulletins to the homepage of the Getting to Zero website highlighting the latest information and resources – case statistics, announcements for educational and research opportunities, links to State & Local Department of Public Health orders and guidance and relevant alerts from other government entities, as well as resources for the community about HIV prevention and treatment, elder services, and mental and behavioral health services during this public health emergency.
- We published ***Guidance on COVID-19 for People Living with HIV*** early in the response (with updates as needed) and distributed widely.



- We sponsored a virtual Town Hall In collaboration with Ward 86 at San Francisco General Hospital on COVID-19 specifically for people living with HIV and to address concerns of the community.
- Sponsored a community forum on safer sex and COVID-19 organized by Bridge HIV.
- We created a new GTZ steering committee subcommittee to address community and health provider concerns as shelter in place restrictions are lifted (or intensified) as the epidemic evolves.
- We are supporting and communicating with the San Francisco DPH Surveillance team to better understand the scope of HIV and COVID-19 co-infection in the City.