



# COVID-19 and Alcohol-associated Liver Disease

## Important Information for Patients and Their Families

The American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) is committed to helping you understand coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) infection and prevention in people who have alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD).

### What We Know

Our understanding of COVID-19 in people with ALD is evolving. When making decisions related to COVID-19 infections or prevention, having up-to-date information is critical.

- Symptoms of COVID-19 infection include any of the following: **fever, chills, drowsiness, cough, congestion or runny nose, difficulty breathing, fatigue, body aches, headache, sore throat, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of sense of taste or smell.**
- Heavy alcohol use is toxic to the liver and can limit the bone marrow's ability to make the cells needed for a healthy immune system.
- ALD (in people who have stopped drinking and do not have cirrhosis) is not a known risk factor for a more severe COVID-19 infection.
- People with alcoholic cirrhosis and/or portal hypertension are at particularly high risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 infection, with prolonged hospitalization and increased mortality. These patients need to take careful precautions to avoid COVID-19 infection. COVID-19 may affect the processes and procedures for screening, diagnosis, and treatment of ALD.

- People with ALD who are older than 65 years of age or have other medical conditions, such as chronic lung disease, obesity, diabetes mellitus, heart disease, and kidney disease, are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 infection.
- The safety of returning to work or other in-person activities depends on the severity of your liver disease, whether you have any other medical problems, current COVID transmission in your community, and whether measures to prevent transmission are being practiced (physical distancing, wearing face coverings, handwashing or using a hand sanitizer, isolating COVID cases). **Note:** All hand sanitizers are NOT safe and effective. Please follow the Food and Drug Administration’s guidance at <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/safely-using-hand-sanitizer>.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased stress and anxiety for many people—around health, family, economic security, and other issues. In particular, the rates of alcohol use and abuse have increased. Reaching out for mental health and substance abuse support and maintaining healthy habits, such as exercising regularly, getting fresh air, eating wholesome foods, and getting regular sleep, remain very important during the pandemic.

## What We Recommend

- Contact your medical provider and/or seek medical attention immediately if you think you or someone in your household may have COVID-19. Inform your treating doctor that you have ALD, as this may impact recommendations for your care.
- If you are experiencing **difficulty breathing, chest pain or pressure, confusion, inability to wake up or stay awake, bluish lips, face, or toes, or any severe or concerning symptoms**, seek medical attention immediately.
- Do not stop or change your prescribed medications unless recommended by your health care provider. Stopping or changing medications could cause a flare of your liver disease or other health problems. Make sure your prescriptions are up-to-date and you have several months of medications on hand.
- Unless instructed by your provider, continue any medications you are currently taking for alcohol withdrawal, hepatic encephalopathy, portal hypertension, ascites, anxiety, and addiction.
- Seek support from your medical team, addiction specialists, counselors, and support groups to begin treatment for ALD and/or to prevent relapse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Keep yourself safe, and help prevent COVID-19 transmission in your community:
  - Practice physical distancing (at least 6 feet) and avoid crowds—especially indoors.
  - Wear a cloth face covering over your nose, mouth, and chin when outside your home.
  - Frequent handwashing is also very important; however, wearing a face covering and practicing physical distancing appear to be the most effective methods for preventing COVID-19 transmission.
- Alcohol should be strictly avoided, as it can exacerbate any underlying liver disease, regardless of the cause.
- Review your medical/legal documents, including medical power of attorney, to be certain they are up-to-date and reflect your current wishes.



## What You Should Discuss With Your Health Care Provider or Team

- Recommendations for your routine health care, including blood tests, x-rays, cancer screenings, endoscopies, and medically necessary treatments, as well as medical visits (telehealth, remote, or special procedures for in-person visits). Minimize routine blood tests and, if possible, schedule blood tests as close to home as possible or at home.
- Changes to your medications (do not change medication dosages or stop medications unless recommended by your health care team).
- Your prognosis and plans for future treatment.
- Safely returning to work, essential travel, and participating in other activities.
- Staying up-to-date on vaccines, including the flu vaccine this fall/winter, to protect you from other infections.

- The risks and benefits of any delay in screening, surveillance, or ALD therapy due to COVID-19 infection, exposure, or center capacity limitations.
- Any new “medicine,” “natural” or not, that you are considering taking (before taking the first dose).

## Where to Find More Information

Much is still unknown about the relationship between COVID-19 and ALD, and new information is accumulating rapidly. Keep checking back to this website as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and AASLD sites for further updates.

- **COVID-19 and the liver from AASLD:**  
<https://www.aasld.org/about-aasld/covid-19-and-liver>
- **Liver disease and COVID-19 from the CDC:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/liver-disease.html>
- **Alcohol and substance use:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping/alcohol-use.html>
- **Protecting yourself and others from COVID-19:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html>
- **Mental health and coping during COVID-19:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>