

# COVID-19 and Autoimmune 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 with autoimmune liver disease (AILD), including autoimmune hepatitis (AIH), primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC), and primary biliary cholangitis (PBC).

### What We Know

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

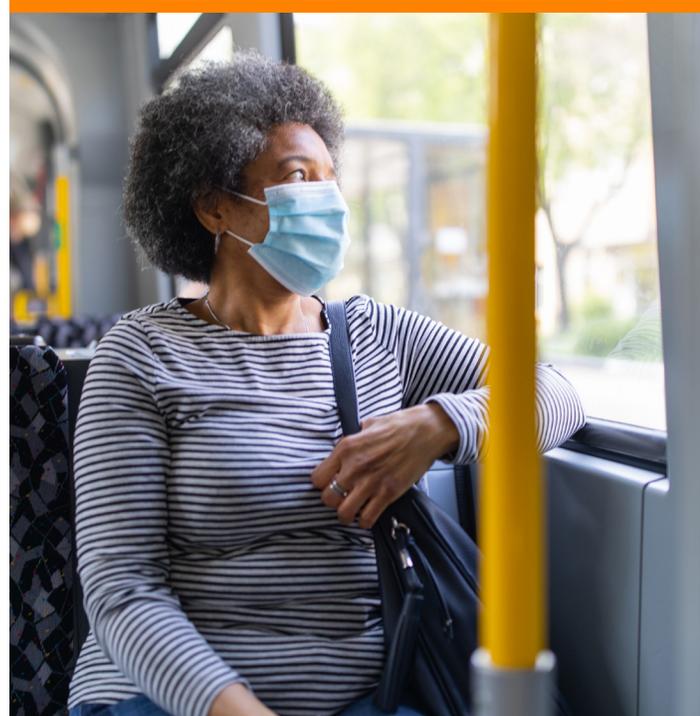
- Symptoms of COVID-19 infection include any of the following: **fever, chills, drowsiness, cough, congestion or runny nose, difficulty breathing, fatigue, body aches, headache, sore throat, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of sense of taste or smell.**
- AILD is not a known risk factor for getting COVID-19 or having a more severe COVID-19 infection.
- People with cirrhosis or portal hypertension as a result of their AILD are at a higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness and/or developing more problems from their existing liver disease if they get a 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 AILD.

- Although people who are on high doses of immunosuppressants or multiple immunosuppressive medications may be at higher risk, the impact of these medications on COVID-19 is still not well understood.
- People with AILD 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 higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- COVID-19 infection can cause liver injury; however, the injury is almost always mild and temporary.
- Antiviral or anti-inflammatory medications that are currently being used to treat COVID-19 can be used in people with AILD.
- The safety of returning to work or other in-person activities depends on the severity of your liver disease, how strongly immunosuppressed you are, whether you have any other medical problems, current COVID-19 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-19 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. Reaching out for mental health 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 medical provider that you have AILD, 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 medical 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.
  - If you have a COVID-19 infection, talk with your medical provider about whether you should decrease or stop your immunosuppressive medications. This is sometimes, but not always, recommended.
- 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 AILD 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 AILD, 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>.
- **AIH and COVID-19:**  
<https://www.aihep.org/>.
- **PSC and COVID-19:**  
<https://pscpartners.org/patients-caregivers/education/covid-19-information.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>.