



SAFETY SHEET, FACT SHEET &  
RADIO PRODUCTION GUIDE

---

# COVID-19 AND COMORBIDITIES

South Africa, Zambia

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in many, many ways, and one of the hardest parts about the virus is understanding how it can affect each person differently. Comorbidity is the presence of an existing medical condition orSo, in the case of COVID-19, comorbidity is an existing condition or disease that could put someone at greater risk of health complications if they contract COVID-19. Comorbidities that are most prevalent in the world include asthma, diabetes, chronic lung conditions like TB, and heart diseases. Since COVID-19 greatly affects lung function and the immune system generally, having one of these conditions with COVID-19 could put a lot of strain on the body.

People with comorbidities are considered high risk when it comes to how severe COVID-19 could affect them. In this case, it is important to know what comorbidities are, what some of the most common ones are that complicate COVID-19, and what can be done in communities to both prioritise the health of vulnerable people, as well as keep everyone safe.



## DEFINITIONS

- **Asthma** is a condition where the lungs and airways are easily irritated and become inflamed. This inflammation narrows the airways, or the ways air moves through the body. This can make breathing difficult, oftentimes causing wheezing or shortness of breath. (WHO- <https://bit.ly/2HtuxWV>)
- **Asymptomatic** means that while one has the bacteria or virus of a certain illness or disease, they show no signs of having it, and may not feel the effects as well. This can apply to both COVID-19 as well as an underlying medical condition that comes to light if one tests positive for COVID-19. (Medline health - <https://bit.ly/2IZivVo>)
- **Caregivers** are people who help care for people who cannot do everything themselves. Caregivers can be family members, medical professionals, and/or family friends, anyone that steps in and gives regular care to someone who cannot care for themselves, whether that person is a child or someone with an illness. (National Cancer Institute- <https://bit.ly/2TsnVKH>)
- **Cardiovascular diseases** are diseases that concern and affect the heart and blood vessel, or in other words the cardiovascular system. Cardiovascular diseases according to the World Health Organization (WHO) are the number one leading cause of death globally. A common cardiovascular disease is coronary heart disease. (WHO - <https://bit.ly/3ordpBC>)
- **Chronic illnesses** are (broadly) conditions that last more than one year and/or need consistent medical attention. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) also defines chronic illnesses as conditions that limit or complicate daily life. Examples of chronic illnesses are heart disease or heart failure, asthma, and diabetes, as these can require regular medical check-ups and treatment. (CDC- <https://bit.ly/37Luf8m>)
- **Community health** refers to the ways communities can take responsibility to promote good health amongst each other and prevent the spread of illness and disease. (Ramussen College- <https://bit.ly/37OaqNX>)
- **Coronary heart disease** is a disease of the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle. It is a deadly disease because it prevents the arteries of the body to pump oxygen rich oxygen to the heart, therefore overall affecting one's body to properly function and fight off infections. (WHO- <https://bit.ly/3ordpBC>)
- **Congenital heart disease** is a disease that is more of a birth defect. One is born with an underdeveloped cardiovascular system, with some having more severe symptoms than others. One can live a long healthy life with little medical attention when diagnosed with congenital heart disease, but others can have more complicated symptoms and concerns long term. (CDC - <https://bit.ly/3mp4iiW>)
- **Cystic fibrosis** is a disease that causes persistent lung infections over time. This disease reduces one's ability to clear out mucus in the lungs; this build up of

## OTHER DEFINITIONS

mucus in the lungs leads to clogging of the airways and it traps germs and bacteria, all leading infections, inflammation, respiratory failure, and other complications. (Cystic Fibrosis Foundation - <https://on.cff.org/3jxlReZ>)

- **Diabetes** is a disease that is defined by high levels of glucose, which is a type of sugar, in the blood. Elevated levels of sugar in the blood leads to long term damage to the heart, blood vessels, and eyes. Diabetes patients usually need to take regular doses of insulin, which is a hormone that helps break down and lower the levels of glucose in the blood. (WHO - <https://bit.ly/3mkS2jF>)
- **Fatphobia** refers to the discriminatory system that shames people for their weight and makes assumptions that to be “fat” is to be “unhealthy”. Health has no look and can’t be entirely observed from one’s physical body. (Huffpost- <https://bit.ly/2HAVwzk>)
- **Heart failure** is a type of cardiovascular disease and it is defined by the heart being unable to pump blood at an efficient rate. Heart failure doesn’t mean that the heart doesn’t work, but it works harder to pump blood throughout the body, which over time, can weaken the walls in the heart and cause other organs to compensate, increasing pressure on them. (WHO- <https://bit.ly/3ordpBC>)
- **Hypertension** refers to high blood pressure, or the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. When this is consistently high, it forces the heart and other organs to work harder, which can have negative health effects over time. (WHO- <https://bit.ly/3dXBNpG>)
- **Immunocompromised or immunosuppressed** means that a person’s immune system, the system that defends the body from infections, is weak or compromised in some way. Having a weak immune system means that anything from the common cold to serious diseases could be very harsh on the body, resulting in more medical attention or greater chances of health risk or death. A weak immune system can be caused by chronic illnesses like being HIV positive, cancer and diabetes. (CDC- <https://bit.ly/3oAU80T>)
- **Obesity** is defined as excess body fat on a person that can result in health complications, especially in relation to COVID-19. However, it is important to note that is a social stigma of obesity, often referred to as fatphobia. (CDC- <https://bit.ly/35zFZrN>)
- **Stigma** is negative feelings, opinions, attitudes and beliefs that lead people to reject, avoid or fear people they perceive as different. Some people can feel shame because there are often social stigmas attached to having health and medical conditions. (End Fund - <https://bit.ly/35BcYOi>)

## TO GET YOU THINKING

**From UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa in partnership with Y+ Global and country-level networks of adolescents and young people living with HIV. (UNICEF- <https://uni.cf/3mrh54t>)**

Q&A with HIV positive adults and children

**Q:** Are people living with HIV at higher risk of getting COVID-19?

**A:** It does not matter if you are young, old, living with HIV or any other illnesses, everyone is at risk if in close contact with someone who has COVID-19. This is why it is important to follow the prevention advice given and get help if you show symptoms. Check out the links below for more information.

**Q:** If I get COVID-19, and I am living with HIV, am I more likely to become very sick and die?

**A:** We still do not know if people living with HIV and affected with COVID-19 may become sicker than those who do not have HIV. We do know that those who have weaker immune systems are less able to fight infections and illnesses – including COVID-19. Without ARVs, HIV attacks and weakens the immune system. That’s why it’s important to continue to take your ARVs to make sure your immune system is strong.

**Q:** Can ARVs treat COVID-19?

**A:** Up to now, no vaccine or medicine can prevent or treat COVID-19. In most cases, symptoms are mild or can be managed and most patients recover. Research is ongoing to find the best treatments and vaccines.”



## TO GET YOU THINKING

- Do you have family or friends that have pre-existing medical conditions that could put them at higher risk of health complications if they were to test positive for COVID-19?
- Why is it important to have a strong immune system?
- What role do you play in preventing the spread of COVID-19 knowing it can seriously harm many people, including people in your community?
- Do you know any other comorbidities that could affect your health or the health of someone you know?
- Why is it important to undo stigma and shame of each others' health conditions?

**SUBTOPIC: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY HEALTH PRACTICES**

This guide focuses on how pre-existing conditions can complicate and sometimes worsen the effects of COVID-19. If people know what makes others vulnerable to disease and increased risk of death, then communities can work together to help prevent the spread of illnesses. The World Health Organization has said throughout the pandemic that social distancing and consistent sanitation significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19. These two practices can make communities safer and can create a sense of shared responsibility of each other's health.

When it comes to community health practices and preventing COVID-19, the same practices can be taken to promote overall health within communities. For example, this year in Tanzania (All Africa Stories- <https://bit.ly/3jpnYkY>), a new sanitation project was introduced into rural communities that promote cleaner ways to get rid of waste from toilets. The project both teaches residents ways to discard waste so that it doesn't contaminate local water sources as well as distributes information on ways to promote sanitation via media campaigns.

These kinds of programs allow communities to be empowered with knowledge of how to care for each other when the infrastructure of sanitation isn't always there, especially in rural and poor communities. This can save lives because it reduces the possibility of people contracting COVID-19 as well as the spread of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), which affect various countries on the continent of Africa. Many NTDs are spread through unclean water and can have severe effects on the body including chronic pain or blindness. In fact, having an NTD and then contracting COVID-19 could be considered comorbidity. Therefore, having community health practices that can allow people to properly wash their hands and keep water clean can save lives and prevent the contraction of chronic illness. Lastly, this also helps eliminate stigma and silence around health conditions and the needs of various community members.

## A MESSAGE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

While COVID-19 appears to pose greater risks of health complications for adults and seniors, it is important to talk to young people about their health and their responsibility in preventing the spread of coronavirus. Parents and caretakers should communicate to young people that they can take actions to protect their health because they too are at risk and the health of people around them. Young people who are caretakers themselves or look after other people in the community or house can encourage children younger than them to understand the importance of small things, like always washing one's hands and wearing a face mask. For parents and adult caretakers, helping young people understand stigma and the seriousness of caring for one's health and encouraging a sense of responsibility to help end the pandemic. Here are some things adult caretakers and parents can take:

1. Inform other community members about the symptoms of COVID-19, which are similar to the common cold or flu, which include fever, feeling tired, coughing, aches, pain, loss of smell or taste. If young people can be informed about what COVID-19 could feel like, they can take their health into their own hands and decide to quarantine, isolate, social distance, and disclose how they are feeling. From there, medical attention can be sought out if needed.
2. Emphasize that young people shouldn't panic about COVID-19, but they can take COVID-19 and the complications it can have seriously. Young people can be empowered to know the risks the virus poses so they can look after their friends, family, and community.
3. Demonstrate a sense of compassion and empathy to young people. Young people are greatly affected by COVID-19 through frequent closures of transport and schooling, and such disruptions can be difficult to adapt to. If there is a sense of compassion and adaptability, young people can practice those same values.
4. Remind young people that while they may be at lower risk of health complications when it comes to COVID-19, it doesn't mean they don't have a role to play. Sharing information about comorbidities and the serious consequences it can have on the people closest to them- older relatives, teachers, community members, etc.- can help young people take the virus seriously and see it as related to them and the people they love.
5. Avoid stigmatising COVID-19 and conditions that could make it more severe. Presenting young people with acceptance can make it easier for them to identify their own symptoms if they have any, or not make negative judgments on people who do test positive who may have visible or invisible comorbidities.
6. Identify ways young people can have a daily life that promotes community safety. This includes wearing a mask, keeping their distance from others, and washing their hands regularly wherever they may go.

## BUSTING MYTHS

MYTH	FACT
<p><b>Having comorbidities makes you more likely to get COVID-19</b></p>	<p>Having comorbidities or a preexisting condition doesn't make you more likely to contract COVID-19; everyone is equally susceptible to getting COVID-19. However, having comorbidities can increase your risk of suffering severe health issues if you do test positive for COVID-19.</p>
<p><b>Young people don't have comorbidities</b></p>	<p>Many young people could have underlying medical conditions that could complicate their health if they were to contract COVID-19. This could include asthma or HIV.</p>
<p><b>I don't feel sick, so I don't have COVID-19</b></p>	<p>Many people can be what is called asymptomatic. This means that while one has the bacteria or virus of a certain illness or disease, they show no signs of having it, and may not feel the effects as well. This means young people and adults may test positive for COVID-19, not feel the effects, but still carry it and pass it to someone who will feel the effects and put their health at risk.</p>
<p><b>Comorbidities are visible</b></p>	<p>Health has no one "look". Therefore it is impossible to judge how well someone may be based on their physical body.</p>
<p><b>Having comorbidities and testing positive for COVID-19 is fatal</b></p>	<p>COVID-19 is still being studied by the worlds' scientists and more and more information is coming out regularly, and it affects everyone in different ways. Having a health condition definitely poses a greater risk for further complication, but doesn't harm everyone the same or lead to death. The effects of coronavirus can be treated and many people do recover.</p>



## DID YOU KNOW?

COVID-19 can put many people at great health risk, but everyone can do their part to help stop the spread of the virus by doing simple things in their daily lives like regularly washing your hands, social distancing, and wearing a mask.



Globally, people with hypertension, diabetes, heart conditions and cancer are at a higher risk of developing serious health complications if they are to contract COVID-19



**COVID-19 IS A VIRUS, MEANING THAT IT ATTACKS YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM. YOU CAN HELP STRENGTHEN YOUR SYSTEM BY PRACTICING GOOD HEALTH SUCH AS TAKING VITAMIN C, DRINKING WATER, GETTING ENOUGH REST, AND EATING A BALANCED DIET.**



**Reducing stigma around health conditions, either comorbidities or COVID-19, can help everyone be able to talk more openly about needs and prevention.**



**Any and everyone is at risk of contracting COVID-19, but communities that have marginalized through racism and poverty may face greater threats of spread due to lack of resources, tighter living areas, and less access to clean water for handwashing.**

## RESOURCES

- **Lenmed: Everything You Want to Know About Comorbidities and COVID-19**  
<https://www.lenmed.co.za/everything-you-want-to-know-about-comorbidities-and-covid-19/>
  
- **UNICEF Report on South Africa and COVID-19**  
<https://www.unicef.org/media/81556/file/South-Africa-COVID19-SitRep-15-May-2020.pdf>
  
- **UNICEF What Parents Should Know about COVID-19**  
<https://www.unicef.org/stories/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-what-parents-should-know>
  
- **All Africa Stories: Tanzania: Sanitation Project Set to Boost Community Health**  
<https://allafrica.com/stories/202007160637.html>
  
- **End Fund: Eliminating NTDs For 1.5 Billion People**  
<https://end.org/the-end-fund-is-eliminating-neglected-tropical-diseases-for-1-5-billion-people/>





### PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

#### ETHICS AND CONSENT

Talking about comorbidities can be sensitive for you, listeners, and people you may interview. Having a medical condition that complicates your health can come with stigma and shame in society. Some people may decide they don't want to disclose the details of their health, so it is important to be prepared for that and talk to people with a sense of empathy rather than spectacle.

#### ANGLE

#### Different ways to talk about comorbidities and COVID-19

- What are comorbidities and why is it important to know what they are in relation to COVID-19?
- How are people with comorbidities taking care of their health during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What role do community health practices play in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting the health of people with comorbidities?
- How can young people take responsibility to understand comorbidities and their responsibility in the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### CHOOSE AN ANGLE



What are comorbidities and why is it important to know what they are in relation to COVID-19?

#### Different ways to talk about: What are comorbidities and why is it important to know what they are in relation to COVID-19?

- Talk about how health and medical conditions are not choices and no one is to blame for having health complications or contracting COVID-19.
- Talk about what comorbidities are and what some of the complications can be based on stories of other people or interviews.
- Emphasize the need for responsibility from young people to take COVID-19 seriously.
- Speak about how stigma could play a role in the spread or discussion of COVID-19 and overall health.



### FORMATS



#### INTERVIEW



##### Interview aim

To source information from someone who has expertise or experience of the topic. Remember that there are different ways to gather audio from someone who is not present with you in the room. The easiest way is to send them the questions ahead of time and ask them to send their answers by sending you a WhatsApp voice note or an audio recording from their smartphone. You can also record an interview live by calling the person, putting the loud speaker on and using another smartphone to record them. The quality of the interview might not be as good as a voice note, but it will still work.



##### Who do you talk to?

A person in your community with a health complication they are willing to talk about, a social worker, a clinic or health care worker.

- In what ways does a pre-existing condition or comorbidity complicate COVID-19?
- What are the best ways to help prevent the spread of COVID-19?
- What role does stigma play in understanding COVID-19 and comorbidities?
- What is the role of young people in understanding COVID-19 and comorbidities?

## FORMATS



### VOX POPS



#### Vox pop aim

To get many different opinions on one topic. When reporting remotely, vox pop questions can be sent to radio show contacts using broadcast lists or candidates found through your social media, as long as members understand that they need to respond via voice note.



#### Who do you talk to?

Anyone in the community.

Suggested questions for recording vox pops with people in your community.

- Do you know what comorbidities are and do you know anyone with one?
- How does it make you feel, knowing that there is greater risk for some people than others?

*Tip: If you interview someone who doesn't know about the COVID-19 outbreak or how to prevent it, use the information in the fact sheet to explain the basics about the virus to them.*



### AUDIO COMMENTARY



#### Audio commentary aim:

To get people's opinion about a topic they care deeply about.



#### Who do you talk to?

Talk to an adult who is willing to talk about their comorbidity with you. Ask them about health challenges prior to the pandemic and then what it means now. Ask questions with sensitivity about how they feel about the pandemic and concerns it raises. Ask them about some of the solutions they have seen or if they think there is a sense of positivity around how people have adapted to the pandemic.

#### Questions:

- COVID-19 can affect everyone because everyone is at risk of contracting it. However, people with pre-existing conditions could face greater risk of health complications if they are to get COVID-19. How do you look out for your own health and the health of the people around you?
- How do marginalized communities deal with both the pandemic and already existing medical issues?
- What are some of the main issues in your eyes?



## DID YOU KNOW



### 'Did you know' aim:

To share exciting, simple and informative facts. These can be shared in the form of statistics, numbers or statements. This is a great format to wrap up the show, emphasise the take-away message of the topic and inform listeners about updated and verified facts relating to the subject being discussed.



### Examples of 'Did you knows' for your show:

- Did you know that some of the conditions that may pose a risk of severe Covid-19 disease and death are cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, asthma, chronic liver disease, and HIV/Aids.
- While everyone is at the same risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, the spread of it is affected by histories of injustice, colonialism, and marginalization. Communities on the continent may be less equipped to social distance due to intergenerational housing (i.e. having many people in the house), reliance on public transport, being an essential worker or unable to work from home, and lack of access to clean water for cooking and cleaning.
- Comorbidities do not always result in severe health conditions or death- medical attention can help alleviate some of the symptoms of the virus



## QUIZ

**NOTE: Adding the quiz format to your radio show is now compulsory**



**Quiz aim:** To test and reward your audience's knowledge on the topic. This format opens up engagement with your listeners, giving them an opportunity to respond to you and the topic. You can pre-record the quiz segment and make it part of your show, asking the audience to respond through your social media, promising to give them the answers in the next show. If your Facilitator will be presenting the show from the station, they could ask the audience to participate in the quiz by calling in or reading their responses via social media during the broadcast. Lastly, the quiz can also be presented through a live broadcast of your pre-recorded show via Facebook Live or Instagram Live.

**Things you need for this activity:**

- Prepared quiz questions and answers
- Small prizes or rewards

Present some quiz questions and hand out prizes to those who answer correctly. From the fact-sheet, we created the following quizzes for you to use in your shows on Mental Health. Once you have used these examples, feel free to create more of your own questions to put your listeners to the test!

**Quiz 1:**

Question: Question: Comorbidities can complicate COVID-19 by?

- A. Weakening the immune system further
- B. Straining the body
- C. Requiring further medical attention
- D. All of the above

**The correct answer is D**

**Quiz 2:**

Question: Which group is more likely to be infected by COVID-19?

- A. No single person or group of people are more likely than others to be infected with COVID-19.
- B. Elderly people.
- C. Young people.
- D. People who have comorbidities like diabetes or cancer.

**The correct answer is A**



### HOW TO PRESENT YOUR SHOW



Because you are not on air, the reporters who are recording the formats will need to pre-record their intros and outros of their formats. You also have to decide as a group about who will present the shows that go out on air. Some of you may provide your facilitator with a script that will guide them on how you would like the show presented, or you may choose a youth reporter to do the intro and outro for the whole show. Making a decision about how you want to present your show should happen in your remote pre-production meetings.

*Use your produced radio features, your research and the suggested script and questions below to create your own script.*



[INTRO:]

**Host 1:** *It's just gone [TIME] and you're just in time for the [NAME OF SHOW] on [RADIO STATION]. My name is [NAME].*

**Host 2:** *And my name is [NAME], and today's show is about comorbidities and COVID-19. Comorbidity is a big word and we are going to break it down. Essentially, comorbidities are health conditions that coexist with another condition that could affect the body. When we are talking about COVID-19, comorbidities are preexisting conditions that could complicate the health of a person if they were to become infected by COVID-19. We are talking about this because it's important to know how COVID-19 can affect us all, and sometimes in different ways.*

**Host 1:** *Comorbidities are being studied around the world to help us understand how the virus affects different people and can lead to serious health risks. Common comorbidities that have been shown to pose health risks to people who become infected with COVID-19 are diabetes and hypertension, or high blood pressure. It's important to note that anyone of any age with comorbidities could be affected negatively by COVID-19 if they are to get it. In this way, knowing about how to prevent the spread of the virus can save the lives of those most vulnerable health-wise.*

**Host 2:** *This is really important! While no one race or age group is more or less likely to become infected by COVID-19 medically speaking, there are people whose risk of health complications are much higher due to having comorbidities. Stigma around health definitely plays a role in this because there is no one-way healthy "looks". Social factors like colonialism, racism, and poverty also affect people's ability to treat their health- marginalised communities may have less access to medical facilities and treatment for either pre-existing conditions or COVID-19.*



**Host 1:** COVID-19 has changed so many parts of our lives, but has shown us how we are interconnected. When we can understand each others' needs as well as consider each others' safety, we can help end the pandemic and literally prevent the deaths of people in our communities and countries.

**Host 1:** So first, let's hear from a clinic worker who knows about and works with COVID-19 patients who have comorbidities

[PLAY PRE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH AN INTRO THAT TELLS US WHO IS BEING INTERVIEWED]

**Host 2:** That was really insightful and such useful information! Now let's hear from someone whose family member has comorbidities and how they are handling the pandemic and the health of their family

[PLAY PRE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH AN INTRO THAT TELLS US WHO IS BEING INTERVIEWED]

[PLAY PRE-RECORDED OUTRO] [INCLUDE PRE-RECORDED HOST LINKS WHERE NECESSARY BETWEEN FORMATS]

**TIP:** Having a clear show clock will prepare all the presenters or reporters about what intros, outros, and formats they need to record before the broadcast date.

[OUTRO:]

**Host 1:** Today, we've heard about what comorbidities are, what their effects are, and what some of the best solutions are to combating the spread of COVID-19.

**Host 2:** Yes, and it's empowering to know what some of the solutions are to help protect the health of our communities. While COVID-19 and the complications it can pose to many people are very serious, being armed with knowledge can help us take action where we can. We all deserve good health and access to it.

**Host 1:** Next week on [DAY] at [TIME] we'll be talking all about [NEXT WEEK'S SHOW TOPIC]. Until then, it's bye from us!