

2023

Holidays Survival Guide

Lots of services will be closed over the holiday period. Albion will be closed on the public holidays but open at most other times. With that in mind and given that the period can be one of high emotion (both good and bad), we thought we'd provide a "survival guide" to help you get through some of the challenges that can arise.

For many people the holiday and new year period is a time for connecting with friends and family, partying, eating, shopping and engaging with their chosen religion.

For some, especially those living with, or impacted by HIV, it can be a stressful time where we are reminded of our losses and our difference.

The following few pages will give some advice on how to cope in Sydney over the festive period, with advice on how to manage your HIV or PrEP, how to cope emotionally, and information on some free things to do.

THE ALBION CENTRE
PARTNERSHIPS IN HEALTH



The Albion Centre 2023/4 Holiday Clinic Hours

Monday 25th December 2023
CLOSED

Tuesday 26th December
CLOSED

Wednesday 27th December
9:00am—4:00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Thursday 28th December
9:00am—4:00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Friday December 29th
CLOSED

Monday 1st January 2024
CLOSED

Tuesday 2nd Jan 2024— Friday 5th
Jan 2024
9am-4pm
(Reduced Services)

**Regular clinic hours resume
Monday Jan 8th 2024**

How do I look after myself and others?

There are some ideas below for coping with the holiday period challenges:

- Reflect on your needs and if they change over the holiday period
- Be aware of pre-existing vulnerabilities, and seek support if you need to
- Be aware your emotions may be heightened at this time
- Look after your basic needs, like sleep and food
- Maintain your routine *as much as possible* – bear in mind you may need to be flexible and adapt your routine to changing circumstances
- Be physically active if you're able, particularly out in nature
- Be kind and patient with yourself if you're finding things difficult
- Maintain connection
- Limit alcohol and other drugs as much as you're able

It's also worth keeping an eye on others. Keep an eye on each other during this time – but remember to look after yourself first. When talking to friends/family, pay attention to the signs they may not be coping, listen to them if they want to talk, and direct them to appropriate support services if appropriate. See the *LOOK – LISTEN – LINK* infographic from the World Health Organisation.

LOOK

- › Check for safety.
- › Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.
- › Check for people with serious distress reactions.



LISTEN

- › Approach people who may need support.
- › Ask about people's needs and concerns.
- › Listen to people, and help them to feel calm.



LINK

- › Help people address basic needs and access services.
- › Help people cope with problems.
- › Give information.
- › Connect people with loved ones and social support.



Food security

Food security can be a particular challenge over the holiday period. Some options within the community can be found here: https://www.newtowncentre.org/uploads/5/1/5/0/51502997/meals_and_food_services_november_2023.pdf

Try not to get “wrapped up”

The image of Christmas and New Year presented in the media often highlights how “magical” and “special” this time of year is. This can be reinforced by seeing images on friend’s social media pages showing how much of a fabulous time they are having, the fantastic food they are eating, and the amazing parties they are attending.

But not everyone experiences Christmas this way. Painful memories can be triggered at Christmas and, likewise, expectations about New Years Eve can lead to feeling like we’re not having as much fun as we should, or as other people seem to.

It’s ok not to take part. This doesn’t make you a bad person. Everyone has different approaches to the period and it’s ok to treat it like any other day.

New Traditions

Having said that, it can also be a time to create your own traditions. Perhaps these are things that you can do with some friends, like a special outing to the beach or a park, a nice meal, or just a phone call. It can also be things that you do on your own. Maybe think of it as a time to nurture and care for yourself. Treat yourself to something small but significant. Watch a movie that you like. Experience the strangeness of empty city streets by going for a walk.

It can be a time to consider giving to others by volunteering. The City of Sydney has volunteer days providing meals to those in need. You can find out about it here:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/participation/volunteer-with-us>

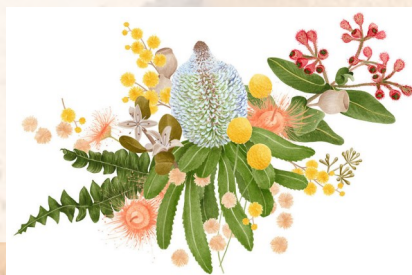
Some volunteering is so popular that you need to get in early, like at the Wayside Chapel (<https://www.waysidechapel.org.au/volunteering/>) and The Salvos (<https://salvos.org.au/get-involved/>).

You can always search “Go Volunteer” for other opportunities (try using the keyword “Christmas”) <http://govolunteer.com.au/>.

A reminder that The Ankali Project needs volunteers to provide social and emotional support for people living with HIV. If you feel like you can offer your community your time and companionship, submit your application to volunteer with the Ankali Project. Read more here: <https://thealbioncentre.org.au/ankali-project/>

Dealing With Family

Christmas can be a particularly stressful time as many of us interact with our family. Be aware of the things or times that may upset you. It can be useful to avoid or limit those times. Take some time out for yourself, and have back-up plans in case things don’t go well. This might involve an “escape plan”, another event (real or imagined) that you need to get to, or a friend who you can call if things get intense. Try to plan this before the day.



Managing Your Meds

Many pharmacies are closed over the Christmas period. Make sure that you have enough of your PrEP or HIV meds to last you through to January. If you are travelling to friends or family, make sure that you have some packed to go with you, perhaps in an unmarked pill box.

New Years can be particularly disruptive; staying up late, and sleeping in. Think about how you're going to take your medications, so that you miss as few doses as possible (hopefully none). Try setting an alert on your phone or stick a post it note on your fridge to help remember.

Managing Your Mood

As we have said, sometimes the holiday period can bring up strong and difficult emotions. Being aware of how to manage your mood is a skill that can be developed. Here's some tips:

1. Meditation and mindfulness skills are here:

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/~media/CCI/Mental-Health-Professionals/Generalised-Anxiety/Generalised-Anxiety---Information-Sheets/Generalised-Anxiety-Information-Sheet---03---Mindfulness-and-Letting-go.pdf>

1. Noticing body sensations and naming emotions as you feel them can help you have more awareness about what you are experiencing and allow you to choose how to respond
2. Being aware of not getting caught up in the negative – activity can provide positive distraction and rewarding energy - e.g. go for a walk

Drugs and Alcohol

Christmas and New Year can also be a time of indulgence, sometimes even over-indulgence. It can be particularly difficult if you are reducing, or quitting a substance. Having others around you who are using or drinking can trigger cravings and urges, as can negative feelings, or boredom. It's worth thinking about what might be trigger points for you, and what you can do to cope. Have a plan about what you will do if you are having an urge. Speak to your psychologist or counsellor, if you have one, about the plan. Some groups run over the Christmas and New Year period and can provide invaluable support. Try looking at the SMART Recovery Website (<http://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/>) or the various twelve step programs (<https://cma-australia.org.au/>).

If you are attending parties and intending on drinking or using drugs, remember to keep yourself safe. Always be aware of your drink, to avoid spiking, and make sure you have a plan with friends about checking in with them before leaving a venue. If you're using IV, make sure you have enough clean equipment, particularly if you may have unexpected visitors, as many NSPs are closed. Re-
mind yourself of your rights whilst partying with this helpful resource from the Inner City Legal Centre (<http://www.iclc.org.au/party-rights/>).



Food

There can be an increased focus on food and eating at events across the festive period. If you are someone who has struggled with eating or body image issues this can make it a time of stress . It's important to keep in mind that one day of eating more than you otherwise would will not make a significant change to your weight, and it's very normal at family events. It can also be helpful plan what you intend to eat ahead of time, as well as a distracting activity for after the meal.

The higher temperatures of summer can also bring more food-borne illnesses as the bugs that cause it grow quicker in warmer temperatures, and people tend to let standards slip when they're busy entertaining or being entertained. Make sure you wash your hands before preparing or eating food, and between touching raw and cooked food. Don't let food sit out for longer than two hours; either get it in the fridge or bin it. If you're keeping it as leftovers, use it within 24 hours and only reheat leftovers once.

Sex

Christmas and New Year can also be a time to indulge in other activities. If you're planning on having sex, think about keeping yourself and others safe. Using condoms is still the best way to avoid many STIs, some of which are painful and difficult to treat. If you're positive and unsure of someone else's status, use a condom to keep them safe. If a condom breaks check with your partner that he is on PrEP and you have an UDVL, if not let your partner know about PEP. This is available from emergency departments at all hospitals but must be accessed within 72 hours.

Free activities to do in Sydney

MCC services

Details of Christmas events can be found here <https://www.mccsydney.org/event>. Please note, these may be online events and may require registration

Fireworks

NYE fireworks are going ahead, though with restricted access this year. You can find out more here <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/sydney-new-years-eve>

The Museum of Contemporary Art

It's at Circular Quay Sydney and has a range of exhibitions which are free and always changing. Check out their website for current exhibitions. <http://www.mca.com.au/>



Positive Life

Positive Life NSW have a number of resources and supports available . For more information contact them on **Email:** contact@positivelife.org.au or call (02) 9206-2177 or <https://www.positivelife.org.au/>

The Institute of Many (TIM) is a peer-run group for HIV positive people and their allies. Acting as a social umbrella, it brings people together to share their experience of living with HIV in an informal, confidential environment. Join their mailing list to see what is happening

<http://www.theinstituteofmany.org/>

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian History Walk

<http://historywalk.tripod.com/index.html> This website has a series of Real Audio downloads of recordings taking you on a historical tour of gay & Lesbian Sydney. Using landmarks in the CBD & inner city, weave your way through the streets of Sydney, hearing tales of our gay and lesbian forebears.

Parramatta reserve walks

The entrance to the reserve is from Lackey Street, off Bourke Street in North Parramatta. There are a number of formal tracks which form a circuit around the edge of the lake which was originally the water supply for Parramatta.

http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/play/sports_and_recreation/walking_tracks

Bush Walking

Awesome website with information about bushwalks in and around Sydney.

<http://www.wildwalks.com/>

Sydney Festival

A stalwart of Sydney life in January, the festival has a number of free events listed on the program <https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/free>

Other events in Sydney

There are just too much to list! There's a whole range of fun, interesting, strange, exciting stuff posted here: <http://whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/> from art exhibitions, markets, events, talks, community events & much more! Search "free" when you're on the site!

You can also check out the website <https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/> which has loads of interesting events and social activities that you can go along to, including LGBTQI groups <https://www.meetup.com/cities/au/sydney/lgbtq/>



Emergency food and assistance

Wayside Chapel Christmas Day Event

<https://www.waysidechapel.org.au/whats-on/christmasdayparty/>

Exodus Foundation

180 Liverpool St, Ashfield

December 25th Lunch 11:30am-2pm

<https://www.billcrews.org/>

The Station

82 Erskine Street, Sydney

<https://thestationltd.org/services/>

The Junction offer a crisis directory for emergency food and assistance

<https://inc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FINAL-2023-PDF-Directory-1.pdf>

The Newtown Neighbourhood Centre also provide information on food and services https://www.newtowncentre.org/uploads/5/1/5/0/51502997/meals_and_food_services_november_2023.pdf

You can search for most local Christmas lunch, church service and carols

<https://salvos.org.au/christmas/events/#search-filter>



RESOURCES, NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

Lifeline: Phone or online chat — 24/7

13 11 14

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

QLife: Phone or online chat — LGBTI specific — 3pm-Midnight

1800 184 527 or

www.qlife.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: Phone, online, video— 24/7

<https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

1300 659 467

Beyond Blue: Phone, online — 24/7

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

1300 22 46 36

Mensline: Phone, online, video — 24/7

<https://mensline.org.au/>

1300 78 99 78

1800 RESPECT: Phone, online — Family and Domestic Violence — 24/7

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

1800 737 732

Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline — LGBTIQ specific — 24/7

<https://fullstop.org.au/>

1800 497 212

Family Drug Support Help Line — 24/7

<https://www.fds.org.au/>

1300 368 186

Inner City Legal Centre — LGBTIQ specific legal service — Mon-Fri 9-5pm

<http://www.iclc.org.au>

9332 1966

Link2Home - Crisis Accommodation — 18+ - 24/7

1800 152 152

Friendline — 10am-8pm —7 days a week

1800 424 287

Available for a social chat, not a crisis service

