

2020

Christmas Survival Guide

Lots of services will be closed over the Christmas 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 Christmas and New Year 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.

ALBION
THE CENTRE
PARTNERSHIPS IN HEALTH

The Albion Centre Clinic and Pharmacy Hours

Thursday Dec 24th 2020 8.30am—
1.00pm

Friday Dec 25th 2020
CLOSED

Monday Dec 28th 2020
CLOSED

Tuesday Dec 29th 2020
9.00am—3.00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Wednesday Dec 30th 2020
9.00am—3.00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Thursday Dec 31st 2020
CLOSED

Friday Jan 1st 2021
CLOSED

Monday Jan 4th 2021— Friday Jan
15th 2021
9.00am—5.00pm

**Regular clinic hours resume
Monday Jan 18th 2021**



Coping with COVID these holidays

There's no denying it, this year the holidays will be different. For many, 2020 has been particularly hard, and while the festive period may offer relief for some, for others it may prove challenging.

Where to get tested

While the NSW response has been very effective, we do need to keep vigilant. If you experience any symptoms, please get tested. For a full list of testing locations and hours, in NSW, visit this site <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others/clinics>

What can/can't I do these holidays?

Some restrictions have been eased in preparation for Christmas, though many remain. To find out what you can and can't do, visit this site <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules>

Food security

Food security has been challenging for many during 2020. Some options within the community can be found here <https://www.kogarahcommunity.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Food-Security-suppliers-of-food-services-to-community-prepared-by-SESLHD.pdf>

How do I look after myself and others?

There are some ideas below for coping with COVID-specific challenges:

- Reducing focus on the news
- Maintaining connection
- Be aware of pre-existing vulnerabilities, and seek support if you need to
- Be kind to yourself
- 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
- Exercise
- Limit alcohol and other drugs

It's also worth keeping an eye on others. Keep an eye on each other during this time – but remember to *fit your own mask before helping others*. 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 WHO below.



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.



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.

Do Something...

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:

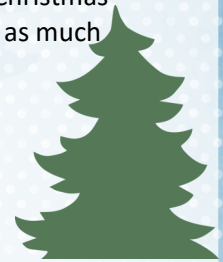
<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/participation/volunteer-with-us>

Some volunteering is so popular that you need to get in early, like at the Wayside Chapel (<http://www.thewaysidechapel.com/volunteering.php>) 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/> .

Dealing With Family

Christmas can be a particularly stressful time as many of us interact with our family. Did you know that Christmas has the highest murder rate of any time in the year? Chill out before it gets that far! 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 Christmas break 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: <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/ACF3C77.pdf>
2. 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
3. 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 (<http://www.aa.org.au/>; <http://www.crystallmeth.org.au/>; <http://na.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. Remind yourself of your rights whilst partying with this helpful resource from the Inner City Legal Centre (<http://www.iclc.org.au/party-rights/>).



Food, glorious food

Whilst it's ok to enjoy the occasional treat, the many parties and holiday feasts of summer can give people a few too many chances to gorge on the richest foods and drinks. Keep your health and waistline in check by keeping your day to day eating habits balanced, and enjoy your parties without going overboard by having a plan. Survey the spread and pick a few of your favourites to really savour, making sure to stick to your limit, and fill the rest of your plate with fresh salads, BBQ veggies, lean meats and some delicious summer fruits.

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 Accident & Emergency at all hospitals but must be accessed within 72 hours.

Free Christmas-y things to do in Sydney

MCC services

Details of Christmas events can be found here <https://www.mccsydney.org/post/christmas-day-lunch>. 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.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe/major-events/new-years-eve>



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.

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/>

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 2021

A stalwart of Sydney life in January, the festival returns in 2021 with a number of free events listed on the program <https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/>

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 <http://australia.meetup.com/> 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 events King's Cross and Bondi

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

Exodus Foundation
180 Liverpool St, Ashfield
8752 4600

<https://www.billcrews.org/christmas-day/>

The Station
82 Erskine Street, Sydney
9299 2252

<http://thestationltd.org/>

Take-away Christmas lunch on Christmas Eve, **24th December** at 12.30pm

The Junction offer a crisis directory for emergency food and assistance

<https://jnc.org.au/jnc-crisis-assistance-directory/>

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.pdf

Salvos Christmas Meal

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/christmas/need-help-this-christmas/join-us-christmas-meal/>

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

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



RESOURCES, NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

QLife – 1800 184 527 or www.qlife.org.au for online chat
Telephone Counselling and Information Line operates 7 days from 5.30pm - 10.30pm
(Includes Christmas Day!)

Suicide Call Back Service: Phone, online, video

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

1300 659 467

Beyond Blue: Phone, online

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

1300 22 46 36

Mensline: Phone, online, video

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

1300 78 99 78

1800 RESPECT (Domestic Violence)

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

1800 737 732

Lifeline - 13 11 14

Telephone, SMS, online counselling 24-hour a day, any day of the week from anywhere in Australia <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Family Drug Support Help Line - 1300 368 186 (24 Hrs).

Telephone counselling offering support for people who have family with a drug dependency issue.

ICLC (Inner City Legal Centre) - <http://www.iclc.org.au>

Is a non-profit community based legal centre that provides specialist Gay & Lesbian legal advice, as well as specialist Transgender legal advice.

You can call them on 02) 9332 1966

Link2Home 1800 152 152

This service is for 18+, provides crisis accommodation options

