

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ADOLESCENTS, YOUTH
AND COVID-19

TECHNICAL BRIEF



World Health
Organization



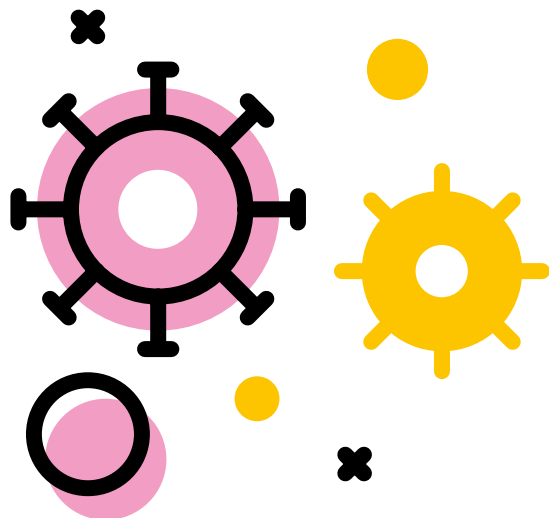
for every child



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

These questions and answers were developed by the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNFPA and UNICEF.¹

We are grateful to young people from the Adolescents and Youth Constituency of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health who contributed to the development of these questions and answers.



Can adolescents catch COVID-19?

Yes. All age groups can catch COVID-19. While we are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, older persons (e.g. persons over 60 years) and persons with pre-existing medical conditions, like high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes, appear to develop serious illness more often than others. As this is a new virus, we are still learning about how it affects children and adolescents. Evidence to date suggests that children and adolescents are less likely to get severe disease, but severe cases and death can still happen in these age groups.

01

READ MORE

→ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52_4

→ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

Can adolescents spread COVID-19 to other people even if they have mild or no symptoms?

Yes. Infected people in all age groups – including adolescents - can transmit the virus to other people, even if they have mild symptoms or do not feel ill. The virus is spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks. These droplets can land on objects and surfaces. People can then become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

02

READ MORE

→ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

¹ These questions and answers were published at the start of the pandemic on the [WHO website](https://www.who.int) on May 4, 2020. The question and answers may be updated coming months as the pandemic progresses.

Since there are few known cases of adolescents getting seriously ill with COVID-19, should I go to a health facility if I develop symptoms of the disease?



If you have minor symptoms, such as a slight cough or a mild fever, there is generally no need to seek medical care. Stay at home, self-isolate and monitor your symptoms. Follow national guidance on self-isolation.

Avoiding contact with others and visits to medical facilities will allow these facilities to operate more effectively and help protect you and others from possible COVID-19 and other viruses.

Seek medical care if your health gets worse, or if there is no one in your family that can take care of you at home. It is important that you follow the procedures put in place by your country. Ask a family member or another trusted adult how you can find out what these procedures are where you live.



→ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

→ <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1272288/retrieve>

What should I do if someone in my family gets really ill with COVID-19?

04

Seek medical care, if members of your family get seriously ill. If possible, either you or an adult should phone the local or national COVID-19 emergency number for advice on where and how you could get care. If your family member is confirmed as having COVID-19, you must be prepared that you and other known contacts will need to monitor your symptoms, and continue to self-quarantine for 14 days, even if you feel healthy.



→ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

I am on medication for a chronic health condition. Should I change anything?

05

It is important to continue with any medication you may be using for chronic and other conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, HIV infection and TB, and attend recommended check-ups. Check with your health authorities and health provider if these check-ups should be done differently during the COVID-19 outbreak. Some services, such as counselling, may be available remotely. For treatment of clinically stable adolescents with HIV and adolescents with TB and/or other chronic conditions, your health provider should consider multi-month prescriptions and dispensing which will reduce the frequency of your visits to the clinic and ensure continuity of treatment, if movements are disrupted during the pandemic. Adherence to treatment is just as important during this period.



→ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-hiv-and-antiretrovirals>

I was due to get vaccinated for HPV, meningitis or tetanus, but immunization services have been disrupted. Should I be concerned?

WHO recommends that all vaccination in schools and mass campaigns should be postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, vaccines provided to adolescents have sufficiently flexible schedules to make sure you can get the vaccine in time when vaccination services start again. For example, the HPV vaccine that requires two doses can be started any time between 9 and 14 years of age and the interval between the two doses can be longer. The minimum interval between doses is 6 months, but it can be 12 or 15 months and, if necessary, even longer. It is most important that you receive the second dose at some point in time to be fully protected.

Decisions to continue routine vaccination services are made by each country. Ask a family member or another trusted adult how you can get information about vaccination services where you live. It is important you get the vaccines you are supposed to get, even if they have to be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



- https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331590/WHO-2019-nCoV-immunization_services-2020.1-eng.pdf
- https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331818/WHO-2019-nCoV-immunization_services-FAQ-2020.1-eng.pdf

I am bored staying home. Since I am very unlikely to get severely ill even if I was to get COVID-19, why is it important that I follow the guidelines to prevent transmission such as keeping physical distance from other people?

Staying at home is difficult and can get boring, but it may help to do something you enjoy. This could be reading a book, playing games or listening to music. Try to stay connected with friends and family every day either by communicating with them by phone or internet if you can, or, if you live close to them and the local rules allow you to, by talking in-person while keeping your distance.

At the same time, it is still really important that you reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by washing your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub as often as possible, keeping at least 1 metre (3 feet) from other people, and avoiding crowded places. You might be one of the unlucky adolescents who does get severely ill if you catch COVID-19, or you could spread it to others and be responsible for them getting really ill or even dying. You have the power to make choices that could save lives and together young people can play an important part in fighting COVID-19.



- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
- <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

06

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Some of my friends are not sticking to the rules about physical distancing. What should I do?



Explain to your friends why it is important to protect themselves and others by washing their hands, avoiding touching their face, always coughing or sneezing into their elbow, sleeve, or a tissue, and cooperating with physical distancing measures and movement restrictions when called on to do so. Maybe you can share ideas for fun virtual activities that your friends can participate in, and you can encourage them to do them together with you or with other friends. This way you are giving them alternatives rather than just telling them to stay at home. But, remember that you do not have control over other peoples' actions so do not get into an argument or a fight to try to change their minds.

08

READ MORE

→ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

I am feeling really anxious about COVID-19 and its impact on my life. What should I do?

In situations like a pandemic it is very normal to feel anxious and powerless, and that is ok. Here are a few suggestions on things that could help you proactively manage your anxiety:

Think about how you are feeling. Don't ignore your feelings, especially if you don't feel well. When your life is disrupted, it is normal to have many different feelings: worry, frustration, sad, stress, anger, anxiety - this can happen to everyone. Draw on skills and strategies you have used in the past that have helped you to manage life challenges, and skills to help you manage your emotions. Here are a few examples:

- Keep a diary
- Express your feelings through art, like writing a poem, drawing, dancing, or playing music
- Talk about your feelings and concerns with someone you trust
- Try some breathing exercises. You may find guided breathing exercises online if you have access to internet.

Do something active every day: Any exercise will help, as it reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, which can help your body and mind relax. Exercise also produces a "feel good hormone" called endorphins which can help to improve your mood. Try taking a walk, running, or any physical activity outdoors while keeping a distance from others. For those who are unable to leave the house, you could open the window for fresh air and do some indoor exercises to stay active.

09

Don't use smoking, eating, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

Stay connected with friends and family either by communicating with them by phone or internet if you can. If you live close to them and the local rules allow you to, you could also talk to them in person while keeping your distance.

Keep a daily routine as much as possible. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same times every day, making sure you get enough sleep. Plan ahead and try to have a balance of activities such as keeping up with schoolwork, physical exercise, connecting with friends and family, doing things you enjoy, and eating regular meals.

Talk to a health worker or counsellor if you, or someone you care about:

- feel overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, fears and worries
- feel like stress gets in the way of your daily routines, or
- feel like you want to harm yourself or others.

At this time, you may find it easier to speak to a counsellor than a health worker, given that there may be restrictions on movement and health facilities may be busy caring for those with COVID-19.



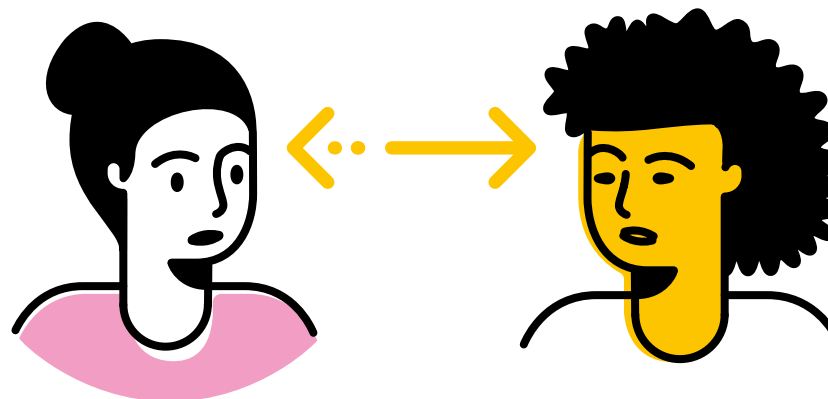
- <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf>
- <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf>
- <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>
- <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2020/04/copingwithcovid-a-webinar-series-on-young-people-and-mental-health/>
- <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/covid-19-and-youth-mental-health>

When will this pandemic end so I can go back to school and meet up with my friends?

We don't know when the pandemic will end, but we know it depends on every individual's contribution in helping stop the transmission. The sacrifices you have made by not seeing your friends and by stopping going to school and other activities are your contributions to fighting the pandemic. By putting societies and economies on hold, we have reduced the ability of the virus to spread through our communities. These defensive measures have helped to limit some of the short-term impacts of the virus, and bought us time to translate what we have learned about the virus into solutions so that we can get back to a more familiar way of living. It is important that you continue to practise these measures and encourage your friends to do the same.



→ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>



Schools are reopening in some areas of my country. Is it safe to go back to school?

A decision to reopen schools in every country and area is made based on careful assessment of the situation, with consensus among all the key parties involved, including the health and education policy-makers, teachers and other school staff, parents and health and community workers. In addition, the reopening of schools are carefully planned and prepared, with all necessary measures in place to protect the safety and health of everyone in the school community.

Therefore, if your school reopens, you should feel assured it is safe for you to go back to school – provided that you strictly follow the guidelines and rules that will be provided by your school.

Of course, if you have any concerns with going back to school, do not hesitate to speak out to your teachers and parents or guardians.



- [School reopening, UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response Education Sector Issue Note 7.1, April 2020](#)
- [Prepare for school reopening, IIEP-UNESCO's COVID response brief, April 2020](#)
- [Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19 <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1277622/retrieve>](#)

I know there is a risk of getting COVID-19 at the moment, but I feel fine. Can I still play sports?

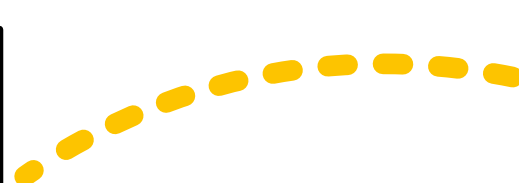
Yes. You can still play sports that are in line with the physical distancing measures and movement restrictions that are in place in your country. Being physically active is good for your health, both physical and mental. Set up a regular routine to practice activities or sports that do not require close contact with others every day for 1 hour. You can do individual sports, like jogging, walking, dancing or yoga. There are many options to try. You can set up playground games indoors, such as jump rope and hop-scotch, play with your brothers and sisters, and practice some strength training activities, using improvised weights like bottles full of water or sand. If you have access to the internet, you can also join in online active games or fitness classes, or set up your own online physical exercises with your friends or classmates. Find an activity that is fun, can be done within the restrictions that are in place in your country, and makes you feel good.



- <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19>

11

12



I am missing out on my education because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What should I do?

Your school or place where you are studying are likely to make arrangements for you to catch up or to do exams at another time. Follow the procedures that your school has put in place to reduce the immediate impact of school closures, and to facilitate the continuity of education. If you have access to internet, you can also consult your teachers and other trusted adults to identify and access reliable online learning opportunities and resources, including those included in the **distance learning solutions recommended by UNESCO**, the United Nations agency that helps countries improve their education systems. In addition, UNESCO is collecting **stories from students, teachers and parents** about how they are coping and continuing to learn during school closures. Access those stories, they might inspire you. You can also contact UNESCO and share your story! Find out **how to share it here**.

In places where internet connectivity is a problem, many governments have started to broadcast educational programmes on TV and radio channels during school closures. If you live in such a place, look out for educational programmes on your local TV and radio channels.

13



- <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions>
- <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/studying-home-due-coronavirus-how-young-people-around-world-are-keeping-their-mood>

COVID-19 is everywhere in the news, and I am finding it difficult to know what is true and what is false. What should I do?

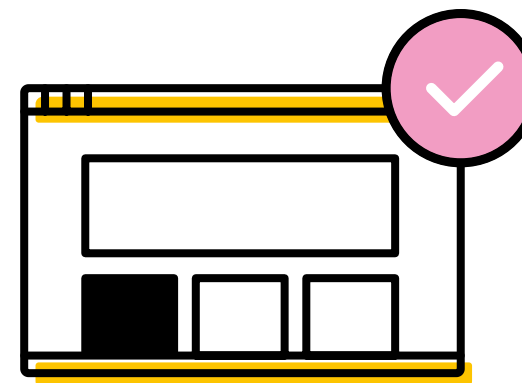
A near-constant stream of news, sometimes contradictory, can cause anyone to feel lost and distressed. Make sure to use reliable sources such as the **UNICEF** and the **World Health Organization's** sites to get information, or to check any information you might be getting through less reliable channels.

If you have a phone, you can use the **WHO Health Alert** on WhatsApp to get the latest information about the pandemic. This is a new service, which is free to use, designed to give prompt, reliable and official information 24 hours a day, worldwide. Start by clicking **WHO Health Alert**, then simply text the word 'Hi' in a WhatsApp message to get started. Keep in mind that overloading yourself with information about the COVID-19 pandemic can also be stressful, so seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day and avoid listening to or following rumours that make you feel uncomfortable.

14



- <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>



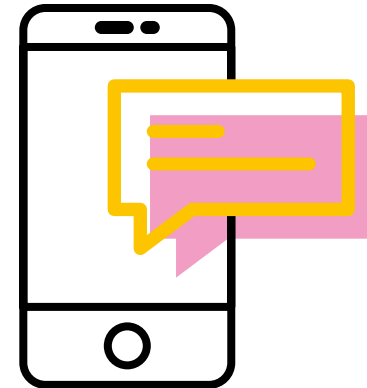
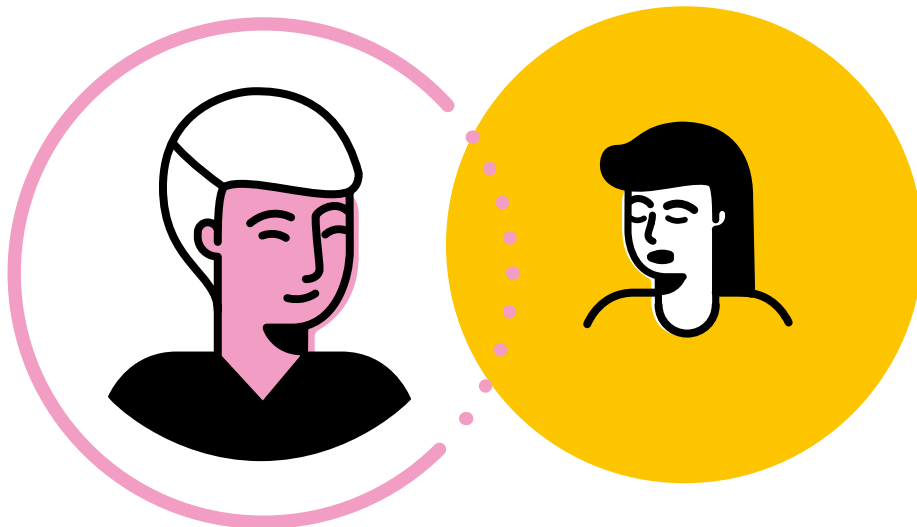
Is it safe to have sex at this time?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through semen or vaginal fluids. However, having sex with someone means that you are very close to them. This puts one person at risk if the other person has COVID-19. Masturbation does not involve another person, and carries no risk of COVID-19. Also, having sex with a partner whom you are living with does not carry this risk if both of you are taking steps to protect yourself from the virus. Make sure to use condoms and contraception to avoid sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.

15



- <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/contraception-family-planning-and-covid-19>
- <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/adolescents-and-young-people-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>



In the lockdown, I am spending much more time online playing games, socialising and studying. Should I be worried about this?

COVID-19 has abruptly pushed many people's daily lives online, and you may be spending even more hours online than before. While online solutions provide huge opportunities for continuing your learning, socializing and playing, you should try to limit the amount of screen time that is not related to your studies or physical activity. This is because you need to be physically active to keep healthy and a positive attitude. In addition, some people are sensitive to flickering lights and may get headaches, nausea, and dizziness, and even seizures if they spend too much time in front of a screen. Therefore it is important to replace some of the recreational screen time with non-screen activities, like listening to music, reading, playing board games, and physical activity, like going for a walk or jog. Excessive gaming can lead to "gaming disorder" that leads to reduced sleep or day-night reversal, loss of appetite, aggression, headaches, and attention problems. If you experience these symptoms, seek help from your parents or a trusted adult.

16

I heard I can be hurt by online contacts. What are my risks and how I can protect myself online?

Since you might be spending even more time online than before, it is wise to be aware of some of the risks. First, be careful what content you share online. Risky behaviour, such as sexting or sharing of sexualized content, can expose you to risks of blackmail, harassment and humiliation. Second, spending more time online may increase the chances that you could come into contact with online predators who seek to sexually exploit young people. When in front of webcams wear appropriate clothing and do not connect with teachers or virtual classrooms from a bedroom. In addition, it's important to note that some adolescents – for example those with disabilities and those perceived to be different or at greater risk of catching or spreading COVID-19 - may be at increased risk of cyberbullying and discrimination. Hurtful, discriminatory or inappropriate online contact is never okay. If in doubt, or if you feel uncomfortable or distressed about some interactions you have online, tell a parent or another trusted adult immediately.

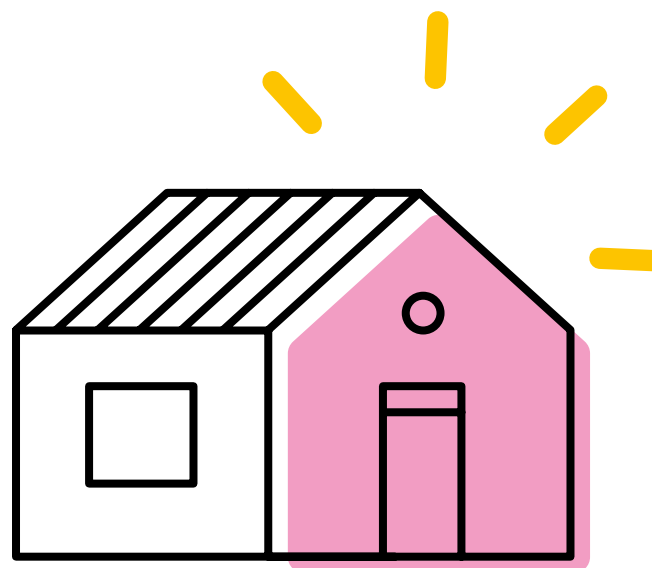
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→ <https://www.unicef.org/media/67396/file/COVID-19%20and%20Its%20Implications%20for%20Protecting%20Children%20Online.pdf>

Since my parents stopped going out to work, they have been arguing with each other much more, and in some instances, I have seen one parent harm or hurt the other either verbally or physically. I don't feel safe at home. What should I do?

This is a difficult time. Many people – including perhaps your parents – are worrying about security, health, and money. When people are in the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown, these tensions and stress can become even greater. It is normal to have disagreements. However, if the disagreements become verbal or physical, then it is right to take action.



If you are worried about what is happening in your home, or don't feel safe, talk to a trusted adult about what worries you, and seek their advice. During an argument or a fight, try not to draw attention to yourself so that you don't end up getting hurt. It might be useful to have a safety plan in case the violence escalates. This includes preparing a bag with essential items, like clothing, documents and electric charger, and having a neighbour, friend, relative, or shelter identified to go to should you need to leave the house immediately for safety reasons. Arrange with the trusted adult to help you alert the relevant authorities who can help you stay safe, including the police, emergency health services and social services.

In many of the countries that have been most affected by COVID-19, essential services are still available, including shelters or protection services. If there are no trusted adults for you to share your concerns with, your country may have helplines, including text services so that you can communicate with someone who can help you or give you advice.

18



- <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>
- <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/who-guidelines-for-the-health-sector-response-to-child-maltreatment>
- <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331699/WHO-SRH-20.04-eng.pdf>

I don't like the way someone touches me at home and we are both at home all the time because of the pandemic. What should I do?

It is wrong for anyone to do this. And it is not your fault in any way. If you are staying in the same house as the person and/or are dependent on him (it will usually be a man), that may make some of the things that you could do difficult, especially during stay-at-home restrictions due to COVID-19. Here are some things that you can consider doing to improve your safety while in the house.

- You could tell him politely but firmly that you do not want him to touch you and ask him to please stop.
- You could inform your parents or other caregivers or trusted adult in the house about what is happening.
- You could inform a trusted adult outside your home such as a neighbour or a teacher or family friend or relative.
- If you have access to a phone, you could call or text for help and support. This includes calling hotlines/helplines for children and women who are in need of help or feeling distressed or subjected to abuse, or calling a child protection service in your area. Be careful not to leave your phone calls or text messages where anyone else could access them.
- If you need to leave the house immediately because he is hurting or harming you, think of discretely (without him overhearing) pre-arranging with a neighbour or trusted relative or family friend to help you leave the house and stay with them until it is safe for you to return home.
- If you have been sexually abused or raped and need urgent medical help or care, go as soon as possible to the nearest hospital or clinic to ask for medical care.

19



- <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331699/WHO-SRH-20.04-eng.pdf>

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