












# UNDERSTANDING WITHDRAWAL RISKS FOR PEOPLE WHO USE ALCOHOL & DRUGS DURING COVID-19

People who use drugs and alcohol are at a higher risk of becoming very sick or dying during the COVID-19 pandemic for many reasons but one important one is that a pandemic can limit access to alcohol, drugs, and supplies which can lead to withdrawal.





By being alert to the larger risks faced by people who use drugs and alcohol, front-line workers can respond better if an emergency occurs.

## What to know about Withdrawal:

- Alcohol withdrawal is the most dangerous withdrawal a person can experience. Without proper medical supervision it can be fatal.
- Alcohol withdrawal can start within only a FEW HOURS after someone’s last drink, but can last for many days after that. **Signs include...**

 Anxiety	 Insomnia	 Restlessness
 Shakes	 Sweating	 Chills
 Nausea	 Vomiting	 Diarrhea

Eventually, withdrawal can lead to:

 Disorientation	 Seizures
 Hallucinations	 Death

**IF A PERSON TELLS YOU THEY ARE GOING THROUGH WITHDRAWAL OR YOU NOTICE THE SYMPTOMS, SEEK OUT MEDICAL HELP IMMEDIATELY.**

Also, though some signs of drug & alcohol withdrawal and of COVID-19 are similar — like chills, fatigue, and muscle soreness— some signs are more specific to COVID-19, like shortness of breath and an ongoing, dry cough.



## What should frontline workers do?

- **Be alert.** Keep your eyes open for possible signs of withdrawal.
  - **Be understanding.** People are coping as best they can.
- **Be calm.** Encourage quiet spaces, dimmer lights, and a supportive atmosphere.

**REMEMBER:** Encouraging regular drinkers to stop cold-turkey is extremely dangerous.

For more information, visit [pmhp.ucla.edu/guides](http://pmhp.ucla.edu/guides)