



ONLINE PRIVACY FOR SURVIVORS LIVING WITH HIV

The rise of awareness about domestic violence and HIV has given many survivors the courage to both speak out and connect with local supports that provide health care and connection to safety. Over the past few years, we've seen this support expand into online life as well. Agencies and community groups are offering opportunities to join online groups to connect with others with similar experiences, there's a plethora of information online about local resources for support, and social media offers a place to share stories and build awareness with friends and followers. This document is a tool for survivors who are living with HIV to learn about key online privacy considerations to think through before engaging with service providers and their broader communities online.

YOUR RIGHT TO PRIVACY WHEN SEEKING SERVICES

You have the right to keep information about your HIV status private when seeking help for domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violence in your life. You do not need to disclose your HIV status in order to receive services.

If you *do* choose to share information with a federally-funded victim services program about your HIV status, or concerns you have about HIV exposure, the program is obligated to keep that information confidential. They can only share information about your status (or any other personal information) if you ask them to, and then only with the specific people or places you request, and only for the amount of time that you request. You can tell the program to stop sharing information at any time. (The only time programs can share information without your permission is if there is a court order or a law that requires them to do so.) Read more about [Federal Laws & Victim Confidentiality](https://techsafety.org/federal-laws-victim-confidentiality) at techsafety.org.

When you seek services or support elsewhere in the community, there are a number of laws that protect your privacy related to your HIV status. You can [read more about HIV related privacy rights at Lambda Legal](#), and read about the [Limits on Confidentiality](#) from HIV.gov.



PRIVACY & TECHNOLOGY

Connecting to support services can help decrease isolation and increase safety. Programs that support people experiencing domestic violence can help you find shelter or housing, emotional support, community connections, employment and educational opportunities, and other support. Many of these programs have websites where you can find detailed information about these services and how to reach out for support. Some programs also now offer online chat as a way to connect, in addition to calling, showing up in person, or reaching out through a website contact form.

There's also ample information available online making it easier to research and learn more about HIV related medical care, wellness, and community building, as well as understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, and how to safety plan. Many social media platforms have community-created groups that offer ways to connect to people going through similar experiences. While this kind of online access to information and connection can be helpful, there are also risks to your privacy and safety that can come with using technology, and are important to consider.

If you are worried that someone else might be monitoring your phone or other device, or the accounts you use on the internet, consider using another way to go online for information about violence or HIV, for example a computer at a library, school, or community center.

It is also important to know that when you search online or click on posts or ads in social media, information about what you search for and the sites you visit will be saved and connected to your profile or account. Even if you are not logged in but use the same device or location frequently, companies may create a "browser fingerprint" that can uniquely identify you. In both cases when this happens, information about your internet use gets consolidated into a profile that companies use to send you targeted ads, and those ads may come up later related to your internet history. If you are on a shared device, or if your device is monitored, someone may see that you are receiving ads about topics you'd prefer they not know you are researching. For information on how to increase your privacy, read our resource on [Internet Browser Privacy Tips: In-Browser Settings](#).

If you are looking for social connection online, it's important to think through your privacy needs in advance. Learn more about how the platform works, what options you have to make your profile private or anonymous, how that platform shares information about you with third parties, and how it responds to abuse. Many social media platforms have help centers that clearly lay out community standards, privacy practices, and what to do if you are being harassed online. In addition to understanding the platform's practices, it also helps to be clear about your privacy



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needs with your friends, family, and other important people in your life. Let them know what information you do and don't want posted about you online. If you need help thinking this through, an advocate can help you make informed choices about what you share online. For more information on this topic, read our [Online Privacy and Safety Tips](#).

There are many online dating sites created specifically for people living with HIV, and some other dating sites let users choose to share their HIV status. Before deciding to use these sites, be aware that many vary in how they promise to protect their users' personal information. And even largescale reputable online dating sites have accidentally shared HIV status and other personal information. As with all dating apps and social media platforms, some communities are more vulnerable to harassment than others. Also, some abusive partners may try to use your status against you, and threaten to out you online as a way to try to control you. It's important to consider how other users may try to share your information on outside forums without your permission, and think through strategies in advance for how to protect against it, and how to hold someone accountable when this happens. You can read more about [Online Dating Privacy here](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ To find HIV related services near you, you can use the [HIV.gov service locator](#)
- ★ To connect with domestic violence related services, reach out to the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at [thehotline.org](#) or 800-799-7233 | 800-787-3224 (TTY).
- ★ [Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure](#), from Lambda Legal
- ★ [Laws Protect People Living with HIV and AIDS](#), from [HIV.gov](#)

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