



**THE REBOUND**

# Big Bend CARES helps HIV patients stay healthy amid pandemic

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (WTVL) — Like any disease, living with HIV during a pandemic presents its challenges.

Now a clinic in the Big Bend area is helping patients rebound and says don't let COVID-19 stop you from testing and treatment.

"For years, I didn't even talk about it," said Pricilla Parker, a peer advocate for Big Bend CARES

An HIV diagnosis is life-changing. Parker knows that firsthand, managing the virus year after year.

"I've been living with HIV since 1994," Parker said.

She now helps other patients get the help and support they need despite the pandemic.

"We try to encourage those who want to be encouraged," said Parker.

Wearing her mask, keeping her distance, and relying on temperature taking station at the entrance.

Parker is encouraging other patients to see their doctors regularly.

"One of the things that we've tried to do during the pandemic is make sure our patients have an adequate supply of medications," said Dr. Jonathan Appelbaum, chair of the Department of Clinical Sciences at the FSU College of Medicine.

Appelbaum can easily prescribe medications thanks to advances in telehealth.

"A lot of patients, especially those who are immunocompromised in any way don't want to come into the office," Appelbaum said.

Visits via the internet solve that problem.

For those who do have to visit in person, Appelbaum says they take plenty of precautions.

"We take temperatures, we ask questions, all of us are wearing masks and gloves," said Appelbaum. "Patients aren't waiting in the waiting for long periods of time."

While he and Parker adapt to treat current patients, they both say testing and knowing your status is crucial.

"Knowing your status is very important because it keeps you healthy when you know," Parker said.

Big Bend CARES serves about 2,000 HIV patients.

Another piece of advice from Dr. Appelbaum to everyone, he says get a flu shot this fall to be extra safe with the ongoing pandemic.

For more information about the services offered at Big Bend CARES [click here](#).