

## Sex and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)\*

\*Adapted with permission from the New York Health Department website at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-main.page>

As we begin to reopen, we need to move forward together by practicing social distancing and other [daily habits](#) to reduce our risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.

### What is my risk if I have sex?

Here are some tips related to sex and how to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

#### Intimate contact increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission:

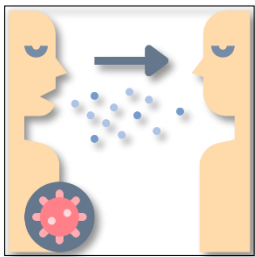
##### 1. Know how COVID-19 spreads.

###### • You can get COVID-19 from a person who has it.

- The virus that causes COVID-19 mainly spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets (saliva/mucus) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes in close proximity within 6 feet.
- It is also possible COVID-19 may spread through droplets and airborne particles that are formed when a person who has COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, sings, talks, or breathes. There is growing evidence that droplets and airborne particles can remain suspended in the air and be breathed in by others, and travel distances beyond 6 feet (for example: during choir practice, in restaurants, or in fitness classes). In general, indoor environments without good ventilation increase this risk.
- People can also get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

###### • We still have a lot to learn about COVID-19 and sex.

- COVID-19 has been found in feces of people who are infected with the virus.
- In one recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found COVID-19 in semen, but further studies are needed to prove that the virus can be spread via sexual contact.<sup>1</sup> Other published studies have not found COVID-19 virus in vaginal secretions.
- We know that other coronaviruses do not efficiently transmit through sex.



<sup>1</sup> Clinical Characteristics and Results of Semen Tests Among Men With Coronavirus Disease 2019, Diangeng Li, PhD; Meiling Jin, MD; Pengtao Bao, PhD; Weiguo Zhao, MD; Shixi Zhang, MD, *JAMA Network Open*. 2020;3(5):e208292. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.8292

2. **Skip sex if you or your partner is not feeling well.**
  - **If you or a partner may have COVID-19**, avoid sex and especially kissing.
  - **If you start to feel unwell**, you may be about to develop symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath.
  - **If you or your partner has a medical condition that can lead to more severe COVID-19**, consider skipping sex.
    - Medical conditions include lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system (for example, having unsuppressed HIV and a low CD4 count).
3. **Have sex only with people close to you.**
  - **You are your safest sex partner.** Masturbation will not spread COVID-19, especially if you wash your hands (and any sex toys) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after.
  - **The next safest partner is someone you live with.** Having close contact — including sex — with only a small circle of people helps prevent spreading COVID-19.
  - **Minimize the number of sexual partners you have.** If you do have sex with others, have as few partners as possible. Avoid sex partners who have symptoms of COVID-19.
  - **If you usually meet your sex partners online or make a living by having sex**, consider taking a break from in-person dates. Video dates, sexting or chat rooms may be options for you.
4. **Take care during sex.**
  - **Kissing can easily pass COVID-19.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts. Consider wearing a mask during sexual activity.
  - **Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact with saliva or feces**, especially during oral (mouth to anus) or anal sex.
  - **Washing up before and after sex is more important than ever.** Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
    - Wash sex toys with soap and warm water.
    - Disinfect keyboards and touch screens that you share with others (for video chat, for watching pornography, or for anything else).
5. **Prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy.**
  - **HIV:** Condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and having an undetectable viral load all help prevent HIV. For more information, visit <https://cchealth.org/hiv/>.
  - **Other STIs:** Condoms help prevent other STIs. Visit <https://cchealth.org/std/>.
  - **Pregnancy:** Make sure you have an effective form of birth control for the coming weeks. Visit sexual health clinics site at <https://cchealth.org/std/>.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit <https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org/>.

**For questions regarding information on this handout, please contact the HIV/AIDS and STD Program at (925) 313-6117.**