

Safer Sex and COVID-19

All New Yorkers should stay home as much as possible and minimize contact with others to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Sex is a normal part of life and should always be with the consent of all parties. This document offers strategies to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 during sex. Decisions about sex and sexuality need to be balanced with personal and public health. During this extended public health emergency, people will and should have sex. Consider using harm reduction strategies to reduce the risk to yourself, your partners, and our community.

But can you have sex?

Yes! Here are some tips for how to enjoy safer sex and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

1. Know how COVID-19 spreads.

- **You can get COVID-19 from a person who has it.**
 - The virus spreads through particles in the saliva, mucus or breath of people with COVID-19, even from people who do not have symptoms.
- **We still have a lot to learn about COVID-19 and sex.**
 - The virus has been found in the semen and feces (poop) of people with COVID-19.
 - We do not know if COVID-19 can be spread through vaginal or anal sex.
 - We know that other coronaviruses do not easily spread through sex. This means sex is not likely a common way that COVID-19 spreads.

2. 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 sex.
- **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.
 - Have sex **only** with **consenting partners**.
 - To learn more about consent, visit on.nyc.gov/consent.
- **You should limit close contact — including sex — with anyone outside your household.** If you do have sex with others outside of your household, have as few partners as possible and pick partners you trust. Talk about COVID-19 risk factors, just as you would discuss PrEP, condoms, and other safer sex topics. Ask them about COVID-19 **before** you hook up.
 - **Do they have symptoms or have they had symptoms in the last 14 days?** Most people with COVID-19 have symptoms, but asymptomatic spread is possible. Fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath are symptoms to ask about. Note that asking about symptoms is not a perfect way to know whether someone has COVID-19.
 - **Have they been diagnosed with COVID-19 using a nasal swab or saliva test?** People who have recovered from COVID-19 at least 10 days from the day their symptoms started and who have not had fever for at least three days are likely no longer infectious.

- **If two is company then three (or more) is definitely a crowd.** Large gatherings of any type are not safe during COVID-19. Close contact with multiple people should be avoided. But, if you decide to find a crowd, below are tips to reduce your risk of spreading or getting COVID-19:
 - Limit the size of your guest list. Keep it intimate.
 - Go with a consistent sex partner.
 - Pick larger, more open, and well-ventilated spaces.
 - Wear a [face covering](#), avoid kissing, and do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Bring an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **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, subscription-based fan platforms, sexy “Zoom parties” or chat rooms may be options for you.
- **If you decide to have sex outside of your circle of contacts or a hook up:**
 - Closely monitor yourself for symptoms.
 - Consider getting a swab or saliva test for COVID-19 on a more frequent basis (monthly or within five to seven days of a hookup). Visit nyc.gov/covidtesting or call **311** for information on where you can get tested. Testing is free at sites sponsored by NYC Health + Hospitals.
 - Take precautions interacting with people at risk for severe COVID-19 illness such as people over 65 years of age or those with serious [medical conditions](#).
 - Be vigilant with face coverings and healthy hand hygiene to minimize risk to others.

3. Having antibodies against the virus that causes COVID-19 or a prior positive diagnostic test do not mean definite immunity. Use test results with caution in helping you make decisions about sex.

- A positive antibody test for the virus that causes COVID-19 may indicate prior exposure, but it does not mean you are immune from reinfection.
- A prior positive diagnostic test (nose swab or saliva) means you have had COVID-19 and may be less likely to be re-infected. We don’t know how strong that protection is or for how long it lasts.
- **Be cautious in using these tests to make decisions about who you have sex with and what kind of sex you have since antibody test results are not definite proof of immunity.** For more information about COVID-19 tests and how to interpret results, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus and look for **COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions**.

4. Take care during sex.

- **Kissing can easily pass the virus.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts.
- **Rimming (mouth on anus) might spread the virus.** Virus in feces may enter your mouth and could lead to infection.
- **Wear a face covering or mask.** Maybe it’s your thing, maybe it’s not, but during COVID-19 wearing a face covering that covers your nose and mouth is a good way to add a layer of

protection during sex. Heavy breathing and panting can spread the virus further, and if you or your partner have COVID-19 and don't know it, a mask can help stop that spread.

- **Make it a little kinky.** Be creative with sexual positions and physical barriers, like walls, that allow sexual contact while preventing close face to face contact.
- **Masturbate together.** Use physical distance and face coverings to reduce the risk.
- **Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact with saliva, semen or feces** during oral or anal sex. Visit nyc.gov/condoms to find out how to get free safer sex products.
- **Washing up before and after sex is more important than ever.**
 - Wash hands 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.

5. Skip sex if you or your partner are not feeling well.

- **If you feel unwell**, or even start to feel unwell, avoid kissing, sex or any close contact with others. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search **COVID symptoms**.
- **If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19**, avoid close contact with anyone outside your household and follow NYC guidance about how to prevent exposing others. People exposed to COVID-19 should get tested for the virus using a swab or saliva test.
- **If you or your partner have a medical condition that can lead to severe COVID-19 illness**, you may also want to skip sex.
 - Medical conditions include lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, liver disease, cancer or a weakened immune system (for example, having unsuppressed HIV or a low CD4 count).

6. Prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.

- **HIV:** Using condoms, taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and having an undetectable viral load all help prevent HIV. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search **HIV**.
- **Other STIs:** Using condoms help prevent other STIs. Visit nyc.gov/health and search **STI**.
- **NYC Sexual Health Clinics:** Call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at **347-396-7959** (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) to speak to a health care provider about STIs. Clinics in Chelsea and Fort Greene can provide walk-in patients with emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV, and initiation of HIV treatment. Visit nyc.gov/health/clinics for updated information on hours and services or call **311**.
- **Pregnancy:** Reproductive health services — as well as fertility services, prenatal care and cancer screenings — are considered [essential services](#) and are [available in all five boroughs](#). Providers may be able to help you without an in-person visit.
 - To find a provider, visit the [Sexual and Reproductive Health Provider Directory](#) or call **311**.

For the latest information, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For real-time updates, text "COVID" to 692-692. Messages and data rates may apply.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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