

Contra Costa Public Health HIV/STD Prevention

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>

All Contra Costa residents should stay home and minimize contact with others to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during the mandatory shelter in place order given by the Health Officer.

But can you 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 can spread to people who are within about 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 when that person coughs or sneezes.
 - The virus can spread through direct contact with their saliva or mucus.
- **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.¹ Other published studies have not found COVID-19 virus in vaginal secretions.
 - We know that other coronaviruses do not efficiently transmit through sex.

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.
- **You should avoid close contact — including sex — with anyone outside your household.** If you do have sex with others, have as few partners as possible.

¹ 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



- **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.

3. Take care during sex.

- **Kissing can easily pass COVID-19.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts.
- **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).

4. 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,** you may also want to skip 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).

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.

Updated: 5.18.2020

Approved by: Deputy Health Officer, Contra Costa County

