



Sex, Social Distancing and COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

March 2020

Sex and intimate contact are risks for COVID-19 transmission. In line with the latest Government advice to prevent COVID-19 transmission, people should only have sexual contact - including with their regular partner - if they live within the same household. You should stay 2m away from everyone who is not part of your household.

The new coronavirus (COVID-19) is changing how we live. Everyone is advised to stay at home and physically distance from others to slow down the spread of COVID-19. Some people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms – but can still pass the virus on to others.

Guidance on COVID-19 from the UK Government can be found by [clicking here](#).

How does COVID-19 spread?¹

- **You can get infected with COVID-19 from another person who has it.**
 - ❖ The virus spreads mainly through airway droplets (through sneezing and coughing) and through directly touching contaminated surfaces.
 - ❖ The virus can spread to people who are within 2 metres (6 feet) of an infected person who coughs or sneezes.
- **There is so much more to be discovered about COVID-19.**
 - ❖ COVID-19 has been found in faeces (“poo”) of people who are infected with the virus.
 - ❖ Although COVID-19 has not yet been found in “cum” (sperm or vaginal fluid) other different types of coronavirus have been found in different ranges of bodily fluid.²

n.b. These recommendations are subject to change as the situation evolves.

Can I have sex?

- **Sex with yourself i.e. Masturbation** (“wanking”) is excellent for your physical and mental well-being. 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. If you use a shared computer, phone or touch screen whilst masturbating please disinfect these devices thoroughly.
- **The next safest partner is someone you live with**, *If* you live with your sexual partner and you are both feeling well; you haven’t been exposed to COVID-19 and are not in the at risk group of having a severe illness with COVID-19; then sex might actually be a really great way to have fun, stay connected and relieve anxiety during this potentially stressful time.
- **However**, if you have symptoms of COVID-19 (these include a new persistent cough or fever of 37.7°C or above) then the advice is that you should self-isolate for 7 days to prevent further transmissions. If someone you live with or someone you have recently had sex with (within or outside of your household) has these symptoms then you need to self-isolate for 14 days. **Self-isolating means no physical contact – no hugging, sex or kissing and have separate sleeping arrangements.** [See guidance on self-isolation](#).
- **Irrespective of symptoms, if you or sexual partner has a medical condition that may lead to a more severe illness with COVID-19**, you should avoid sex.³
- **You should avoid close contact — including sex — with anyone outside your household.** **If you don’t live with your sexual partner**, consider moving in to the same living space

temporarily. Additional travel puts your friends, family and community at risk, so make a responsible choice.

- **Avoid physical group sex** (more than one sexual partner at the same time) to stop the spread of COVID-19.
- If you usually meet your sex partners **online or are a sex worker**, consider taking a break from in-person dates. Video dates, phone sex, sexting or chat rooms may be options for you.

How can I make sex safer?

- **If you are going to have sex, you can reduce the harm to yourself and your partners.**
 - ❖ **Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact** with sperm (“cum”), saliva (“spit”) and faeces (“poo”), especially during oral and anal sex.
 - ❖ **Kissing passes on COVID-19.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your household .
 - ❖ **Rimming (mouth on anus) is very likely to spread COVID-19⁴** as the virus in faeces can enter your mouth so you should avoid it during this time.
 - ❖ **Washing before and after sex is essential.** Wash your hands and sex toys with soap and warm water. Do not share sex toys during this time.

What if I have sexual health symptoms or need an STI test?

Sexual health and contraceptive services will be triaging their work – dealing with the most urgent and serious things first. Many clinics are running severely reduced services in order to stick to the recommended strict social / physical distancing measures and will only be able to see patients who have urgent sexual health-related problems.

- **Preventing HIV:** If you’ve been at risk within the last 24-72 hours, you might be able to prevent HIV infection by taking PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis), ideally within 24 hours of the risk, and no later than 72 hours. You can get PEP from a sexual health clinic or hospital A&E department. A doctor will advise you if PEP is suitable for you based on the level of risk. [For more information about PEP, click here.](#)
- **Testing and treatment for STIs:** If you need to access an STI test, you may not be able to access a physical sexual health clinic. If you have symptoms of an STI, you should phone your local clinic and they will tell you what you should do. Screening and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be performed using a home test kit or ordered online.
- **Contraception:** Make sure you have an effective form of contraception for the coming months. Your local clinics should have a telephone triage service set up to advise you further on the best contraceptive choice for you.
- **Abortion:** Services are still being provided but a move to video or telephone clinics is happening to minimise contact and risk of COVID-19. Arrangements for treatment and post abortion care will vary across the country. <https://www.fsrh.org/fsrh-and-covid-19-resources-and-information-for-srh/>

To find your nearest sexual health service: [Click here for Scotland.](#) [Click here for England.](#) [Click here for Wales.](#)

How can I maintain social contact and wellbeing whilst physically distancing?

- **Do something good in your community** by helping out from a safe distance with the mutual aid of neighbourhood groups and community (check social media) who might be self-isolating and need your help. Lots of organisations need volunteers, from phone befriending isolated people, ambulance brigade, HIV charities, food banks, pet fostering and more. A lot of this can be done from home too.
- **Try a new activity:** Virtual pub quizzes online, phone chats, gaming, reading, learning a new language or an online exercise class.

What about HIV and COVID-19?

- **If you are HIV negative to prevent getting HIV:**
 - ❖ Having sex with partners who **have HIV and an undetectable viral load** means there is no way of transmitting HIV but you can still catch other STIs or get pregnant, so condom use is advised.
 - ❖ **Pre- exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is another option to prevent HIV⁶**, which you can buy online relatively inexpensively but you should have an HIV test (available online) before starting. To learn how to buy PrEP online and start safely – [check out PrEPsters website here](#). Sex with partners who are not already part of your household should be avoided as you should stay at home, avoiding non-essential travel and keep 2 metres apart.
- **If you are living with HIV during COVID-19:**
 - ❖ Your local clinic will have made arrangements to ensure your medication supply is available either to be delivered to you (with your permission) or for you (or a designated person) to collect on your behalf. ***Your local clinic will contact you closer to the time of your appointment.***
 - ❖ You are not at increased risk because of your HIV diagnosis **unless** you are not taking medication for HIV⁵ but you should follow physical distancing precautions. See [here](#).
 - ❖ If you have a CD4 Count of under 200 you are vulnerable and at a higher risk of severe illness so you should follow physical distancing precautions as stated [here](#).
 - ❖ If you have a CD4 count of under 50 then you are considered very vulnerable. You should self-isolate for 12 weeks as per advice.⁷

If I've been raped or sexually attacked who can help me?

It can be hard to make sense of what has happened. **Remember: if it wasn't your choice, you haven't given consent.**

- For advice, [call your local Sexual Assault Referral](#) centre (SARC). They will listen to you and [offer you help](#), including treatment and support, and make it easier for you to work out what you want to do.
- You don't have to involve the police if you don't want to. But if you want police advice, you [can call them directly](#). You can also speak to a specialist officer anonymously.
- **The law says :**
 - ❖ Rape and sexual assault can happen to anyone – regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity.
 - ❖ Rape is when someone puts their penis into (penetrates) the vagina, anus or mouth of another person without their consent.
 - ❖ Assault by penetration is when someone puts another part of their body – or an object – into another person's vagina or anus without that person's consent.
 - ❖ Sexual assault is when someone touches another person in a sexual way, without that person's consent.
- **If you have been raped or sexually assaulted find a local service here:** <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Rape%20and%20sexual%20assault%20referral%20centres/LocationSearch/364>
- **Emotional support can be sought at any time by contacting the Rape Crisis Centre as follows:**
 - ❖ **England and Wales:** <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/>

❖ **Scotland:** <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/>

❖ **Ireland:** <https://www.rcni.ie/>

Other support

- HIV Scotland Helpline is live between 10am - 6pm, Monday to Friday. Dial 0131 558 3713.
- THT advice number is 0808 802 1221. <https://www.tht.org.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19>
- Ask Brook text service 07717 989 023 (Standard SMS rate) or use web chat by going [Here](#)
- CALM call 0800 58 58 58 / webchat <https://www.thecalmzone.net/>
- Domestic violence help: 0808 2000 247 <https://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/>
- LGBT Switchboard: call 0300 330 0630 / online chat / <https://switchboard.lgbt/>
- LGBT+ anti-violence help <http://www.galop.org.uk/>

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(2) [Niedrig M, Patel P, El wahed AA, Schädler R, Yactayo S. Find the right sample: A study on the versatility of saliva and urine samples for the diagnosis of emerging viruses. BMC Infect Dis. 2018;18\(1\):707. doi: 10.1186/s12879-018-3611-x](#)

(3) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

(4) [Yeo C, Kaushal S, Yeo D Enteric involvement of coronaviruses: is faecal–oral transmission of SARS-CoV-2 possible? Lancet Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2020; \(published online Feb 19.\) https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-1253\(20\)30048-0](#)

(5) <https://www.hiv.scot/Pages/FAQs/Category/prep-coronavirus>

(6) <https://www.bhiva.org/coronavirus-and-HIV-responses-to-common-questions-from-BHIVA>

(7) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>