Safer Sex and COVID-19

Safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines allow us to more safely engage in relationships, sex and everything in between! Practice these strategies to protect yourself and your partners from COVID-19.

Know how COVID-19 spreads
The virus spreads by infected saliva, mucus, or respiratory particles being inhaled or entering the eyes, nose, or mouth.

- The virus can spread during sex since sex can involve close heavy breathing and contact with saliva.
- There is no evidence the virus spreads through semen or vaginal fluid, though the virus has been found in the semen of people who have COVID-19.
- The risk of spreading the virus through feces (poop) is thought to be low, though the virus has been found in the feces of people who have COVID-19. Research is needed to know if the virus can spread through sexual activities involving oral contact with feces (such as rimming).

Tips for reducing the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 during sex

Get vaccinated!
- COVID-19 vaccination allows for safer interactions inside and outside the bedroom. It is the best way to protect yourself and unvaccinated partners from COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death.
  - Visit **vaccinefinder.nyc.gov** or call **877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692)** to find a vaccination site. Vaccination is free and appointments are not needed at many sites.
- People who are fully vaccinated (meaning at least two weeks since they got a single-dose vaccine or the second dose of a two-dose vaccine) can go on dates, make out and have sex without face coverings and other COVID-19 precautions.
- While everyone should get vaccinated, it is especially important to do so if you:
  - Are at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness.
  - Attend sex parties or get-togethers with large groups; have group sex, multiple sex partners or sex with people you do not know; or engage in sex work.
- Even if you are fully vaccinated, get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms. If you test positive, avoid having sex and close contact with others until your isolation period ends.

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If you are NOT vaccinated:

- **Talk about COVID-19 risk factors before you hook up**, such as:
  - **Vaccination.** If your partner is fully vaccinated, you are at lower risk.
  - **Recent COVID-19 testing.** If positive, avoid sex and close contact. If negative, keep in mind a test only shows if a person may have been infected when they were tested. See COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions for more information.
  - **Recently had COVID-19.** Someone who had COVID-19 (positive diagnostic test) is unlikely to get it again within three months after their infection. This makes them a safer partner.
  - **Recent COVID-19 exposure.** Unless fully vaccinated, close contact with others should be avoided for 10 days after an exposure, even if the person exposed tests negative for COVID-19.
  - **COVID-19 precautions.** Being intimate with people who wear a face covering and follow other COVID-19 prevention measures is a safer way to go.
- **Play safer.**
  - **Avoid sex parties and other gatherings.** If you do attend:
    - Go with a consistent sex partner.
    - Pick larger, more open and well-ventilated spaces.
    - Bring and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
    - Wear a face covering and avoid kissing.
    - Monitor for symptoms and get tested before and after getting together with others. Visit the COVID-19 testing page or call **311** to find a no-cost testing site.
  - **Limit your sex partners** to people you live with or who are in your social bubble.
  - **Enjoy sex virtually,** such as video dates, sexting, sexy Zoom parties or chat rooms.
  - **Avoid kissing** anyone you do not live with or who is not in your social bubble.
  - **Wear a face covering or mask, even during sex!** Maybe it's your thing, maybe it's not, but wearing a face covering over your nose and mouth adds a layer of protection.
  - **Make it 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 distance and face coverings to reduce the risk.
  - **Use condoms and dental dams** to reduce contact with saliva, semen or feces during oral or anal sex or rimming.
  - **Wash up before and after sex.** Wash hands and sex toys with soap and warm water. Disinfect keyboards and touch screens you share with others.

Continue practices to prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy, including accessing sexual health care.

NYC Health Department HIV, STI and contraception services:

- Call Sexual Health Clinical Hotline at 347-396-7959 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) to talk to a health care provider.
- Visit **nyc.gov/health/clinics** or call **311** for Sexual Health Clinic hours and services.
- Call the 24/7 NYC PEP Hotline at 844-3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692) if you think you were exposed to HIV.
- Visit **nyc.gov/condoms** to find out how to get free safer sex products.

For the latest information, visit **nyc.gov/health/coronavirus**.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 6.18.21

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