

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT SEX AND COVID-19



Coronaviruses are not included among sexually transmitted infections. It is, however, important to consider some aspects of the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus so that you may enjoy safer sexual relations.

01 WHAT IS COVID-19?

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is a new type of coronavirus that can affect people and cause the disease known as COVID-19. **The most common symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. In some cases there may also be digestive symptoms such as diarrhoea and abdominal pain, and a temporary loss of the sense of smell. Most often, the disease is benign and the symptoms are mild.** In more severe cases, the infection can cause pneumonia, serious breathing difficulty, kidney failure, and even death. The most serious cases generally occur in people who belong to a vulnerable group.

02 HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

The virus is spread through the air if you come in contact with saliva or mucus produced by the coughing or sneezing of someone who has the virus. Its capacity to spread depends on the amount of the virus in the respiratory tract. These secretions will infect another person if they enter into contact with their nose, eyes, or mouth. Transmission by air over distances greater than 1-2 metres seems unlikely. Furthermore, given that these drops may end up on surfaces, the virus can also be transmitted by the touching eyes, nose or mouth after contact with contaminated surfaces.

03 CAN IT BE TRANSMITTED SEXUALLY?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are not generally considered to be sexually transmitted infections, as they are not transmitted efficiently sexually. However, **we still do not have in-depth knowledge about the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. It is important to remember that it is present in saliva and faeces and can be transmitted through sexual practices that involve contact with these fluids (see question 5).** To date, this new coronavirus has not been detected in semen or in vaginal fluid.

04 CAN I HAVE SEX WITH OTHER PEOPLE?

In periods of physical distancing and confinement of the population, you are your safest sexual partner. COVID-19 cannot be spread through masturbation, 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 live with your partner, you can keep on having sex as before, following the usual measures of hygiene.**

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ENTIDAD DECLARADA DE UTILIDAD PÚBLICA
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Although it can be challenging for many people, you should avoid close contact, including sex, with anyone from outside the home. If you cannot avoid having sex with other people, try to do it with as few partners as possible. If you usually meet the people you have sex with through contact finder search apps, you could consider taking a break during the periods of physical confinement and distancing. **Sexting, video calls or chat rooms are different options for keeping sex at a distance.**

If you engage in chemsex, it could be useful to know the recommendations issued by Energy Control for reducing the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in people who use drugs in sexual contexts. You can access these by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.chem-safe.org/chemsex-fiestas-y-drogas-en-tiempos-de-coronavirus/>

05

WHAT CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD I KEEP IN MIND DURING SEX?

For the time being, the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is known to be present in the respiratory tract and faeces. If you decide to have sex, you should remember that:

- **Kissing can easily transmit SARS-CoV-2.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of very close contacts.
- **Rimming (oral-anal sex) can transmit SARS-CoV-2.** The coronavirus in the faeces can enter your body via the mouth.
- **Using condoms and latex barriers (dental dam) helps to prevent contact with saliva or faeces,** especially during oral, oral-anal or anal sex.
- **Washing before and after sex is now more important than ever.** It is very important to wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and to wash sex toys with warm soapy water.
- **Disinfecting keyboards and touchscreens you share with others** (for video calls, for watching pornography or for anything else) is one way of containing the spread of the coronavirus.

06

IF MY PARTNER OR I DO NOT FEEL WELL, CAN WE HAVE SEX?

Avoiding sexual engagement-particularly kissing- is recommendable if you suspect that either you or your partner have contracted the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Remember that if you start to feel unwell, you may develop symptoms such as a fever, cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing. In addition, should either of you already have an underlying condition that could worsen COVID-19 if acquired, you could decide not to have sex or to perform other sexual acts that pose a lower risk of coronavirus transmission. Underlying conditions include high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, lung diseases, cancer or immunodeficiency.

07

WHAT OTHER ASPECTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DURING SEX?

Remember that **you have a range of tools available to help to prevent HIV** in your sexual relationships. These include condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis, post-exposure prophylaxis or undetectable viral load due to antiretroviral treatment, if your partner has HIV. Condoms are also a good tool for preventing most sexually transmitted infections. It is also important, if you are a woman, to make sure that you have an effective available method of contraception during periods of confinement.

08

IF I HAVE A SEXUAL HEALTH PROBLEM, MAY I RECEIVE EMERGENCY CARE?

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, health centres in the healthcare network have changed the way they operate and have adopted special protocols to care for patients while minimising the risks. These modifications could include care by telephone or internet. For sexually transmitted infections (STIs), **many health centres and STI centres have decided to postpone routine medical appointments and screenings** and only to attend to urgent cases of people who have the symptoms of STIs. If you think you have a sexual health-related emergency, **it is important to contact your health or STI centre before visiting.**



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**FREE COVID-19
HELPLINE NUMBERS**

Andalusia	900 400 061 / 955 545 060
Aragón	976 696 382
Asturias	984 100 400 / 900 878 232 / 112 + 1
Cantabria	900 612 112
Castile-La Mancha	900 122 112
Castile and León	900 222 000
Catalonia	061
Ceuta	900 720 692
Madrid Com.	900 102 112
Valencian Com.	900 300 555
Extremadura	900 222 012
Galicia	900 400 116
Balearic Islands	902 079 079 / 971 437 079
Canary Islands	900 112 061
La Rioja	941 298 333
Melilla	112
Murcia	900 121 212
Navarra	948 290 290
Basque Country	900 203 050

Source: Adaptation of 'Sex and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)' by New York City Department of Health.



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