

Talking to Clients About Safer Sex During COVID-19

It is important to talk about safer sex with clients. Many clients want to or are engaging in sex for reasons including pleasure, survival, or connection to others, and during this time sexual activity carries the risk of COVID-19 transmission. As health and helping professionals, we can help clients identify ways to reduce their risk of getting COVID-19 during sex through education, discussing risk reduction strategies, and helping clients create a plan that best fits their needs. You can use the following steps to have this conversation with clients:

Check in With Yourself

Before engaging with the client, check in with yourself. Ask yourself:

1. How am I feeling?
2. What am I telling myself about this?

Step 1: Introduce

Introduce the topic of safer sex for COVID-19 prevention.

- *“It can be challenging to navigate having safer sex and preventing COVID-19.”*
- *“I am talking to all my clients about this – can we talk about safer sex and COVID-19?”*

Step 2: Explore

Explore the client’s feelings and thoughts about sex and COVID-19.

- *“What have you heard about how to protect yourself from COVID-19 during sex?”*
- *“What concerns might you have about having sex while staying safe?”*

Step 3: Provide Education

- How COVID-19 is spread and what is known about COVID-19 and sexual activities

Step 4: Share COVID-19 Risk Reduction Strategies

- Levels of Risk
- Risk reduction strategies to use before and during sex

Step 5: Make a Plan

- *“Many clients find it helpful to make a plan ahead of time. What steps can you take to be prepared?”*
- Offer strategies for creating a safer sex plan

Step 6: Identify Next Steps and Support

- *“What might you find challenging? How can I support you?”*
- Remind the client of their toolbox and agency resources



What We Know About COVID-19 and Sex

- Coronavirus spreads through respiratory droplets which are released into the air from people's bodies when they talk, sing, sneeze, or cough.
- Respiratory droplets enter the body through the nose, eyes, or mouth.
- Kissing can easily spread the coronavirus through exchange of saliva.
- During sex, people are often very close to and breathing on each other, which increases the risk of getting the coronavirus.
- There are several ways to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission during sex, including hand washing, wearing a mask, and using virtual methods for sexual interactions.

Levels of Risk

There are different choices that we make around sex that impact the risk of getting COVID-19. Below are several activities and their associated risks. It is important to remember that COVID-19 can be spread asymptotically, and prior infection does not guarantee immunity.

LOW RISK



- You are your safest partner - masturbation does not spread COVID-19
- Sex with someone you already live with who has been taking precautions

MEDIUM RISK



- Sex with a person who lives outside the home, and both of you are monogamous
- Participants are taking precautions against COVID-19
- Participants are not showing symptoms of COVID-19

HIGH RISK



- Having sex with unfamiliar people outside the home
- Unknown symptoms or precautions taken
- Sex with a person showing COVID-19 symptoms

Risk Reduction Tips and Strategies for Preventing COVID-19 During Sex

Below are some tips and strategies for preventing COVID-19 transmission during sexual activities. To keep up to date with the latest information on COVID-19 and sex, be sure to check trusted sources like the CDC and the New Jersey and New York City Department of Health websites.

Virtual Connections

- Explore creative ways to have sexual connections like phone/video calls or texting
- Be mindful of privacy and trust with partners

Practice Hygiene

- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after sex
- Take a shower before and after sex
- Wash sex toys, and do not share them

Use Protection

- Condoms and dental dams reduce physical contact with bodily fluids
- Protection prevents unintended pregnancy
- Protection prevents transmission of sexually transmitted infections

Other Considerations for Sex

- Kiss partners you are familiar with
- Refrain from rimming (mouth on anus)
- Wear a face covering or mask during sex
- Use creative positions or activities like mutual masturbation, etc.
- Choose sexual partners carefully
- Three's a crowd – try to limit the number of sexual partners
- Don't have sex if you or your partner are not feeling well