

SEX AND COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 (herein referred to as the COVID-19 virus), is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person-to-person in respiratory droplets from someone who is infected ([CDC link](#)). At this point in time, sexual transmission of the virus has not been documented; however, you can acquire COVID-19 virus through exposure to respiratory droplets when in close contact (less than 6 feet). When kissing or having sex - defined as vaginal, anal or oral sex - you are physically close to another person, which can put you in contact with respiratory droplets or saliva that spread the COVID-19 virus.

Evidence of the COVID-19 virus has not been found in the vaginal fluids^{1,2,3} of patients diagnosed with COVID-19. Parts (nucleic acid) of the COVID-19 virus have been found in the semen⁴ and feces^{5,6} of some patients diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. However, it is not known if the virus found in semen and feces is capable of causing infection⁷. To date, there have been no reports of the virus spreading from the semen and feces of an infected person to another person. Studies continue to investigate different ways the virus can spread from person-to-person.

Below we discuss how sex partners can carry different levels of risk for spreading the COVID-19 virus. Based on current evidence, we also share safety measures you can take for lowering your potential risk of spreading or acquiring the virus.



PARTNERS IN YOUR HOME

Is it safe to have sex with my spouse/partner? We don't have any other partners and live in the same house.

For preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the safest sex partners are those who already live with you and are at low risk of infection. If you and your partner are healthy and feeling well, staying at least 6 feet from other people outside the household, washing your hands often, and wearing face masks or cloth face coverings in public settings, sex is likely to be safe.

Even if you and your partner feel healthy, there is still risk of having the COVID-19 virus. The COVID-19 virus can spread from person-to-person even if someone has no signs of infection. The virus can be contagious in people who never develop symptoms (asymptomatic) and in people not showing symptoms (pre-symptomatic) ([CDC link](#)). Even though your partner feels well and does not look sick, s/he/they can still spread the virus to you, and you can spread it to others.



My spouse/partner has a high-contact job, where s/he/they cannot practice social distancing. Is it safe to have sex?

Partners with high-contact jobs, such as medical providers, grocery store clerks, or factory workers, may choose to self-quarantine from others in the household and/or implement extra measures when arriving home. Examples of these measures include, immediately after arriving home, removing any clothing worn during their workday, taking off shoes, washing clothing, and showering ([CDC link](#)). However, except for self-quarantine, these are optional practices because there is insufficient evidence on whether they are effective ([CDC link](#)).

Based on what we know about the COVID-19 virus, there are additional measures you can take for safer sex to lower your potential risk:

- ✓ Avoid kissing⁸
- ✓ Wear a face mask or cloth face covering and ask your partner to do the same^{9,10}
- ✓ Use condoms to reduce your contact with saliva, semen and feces during anal and oral sex^{11*}



My partner and I both tested positive for COVID-19. Are we immune, and is it safe to have sex?

Right now, we do not know if the antibodies (specific proteins made in response to infection) that result from the COVID-19 virus will provide someone with immunity from a future infection ([CDC link](#)). If antibodies do

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provide immunity, we don't know the amount of antibodies needed for protection or how long that protection can last ([CDC link](#)). Although the immune response to COVID-19 is not fully understood, there is some evidence of at least short-term protective immunity.¹²

It is likely safe for you and your partner to have sex as long as you continue to follow preventive safety guidelines to protect yourself and others ([CDC link](#)). Avoid having additional sex partners and have discussions with your partner about his/her/their sexual practices, as this could change your level of risk.



I think I had COVID-19 based on my symptoms but did not get tested. Is it safe for my household partner and I to have sex?

If you think you had the COVID-19 virus based on your symptoms ([CDC link](#)), you may wish to confirm a previous infection through antibody testing. A positive test result shows you have antibodies that likely resulted from an infection with SARS-CoV-2 ([CDC link](#)). This means you and your partner are likely safe to have sex as long as you continue to follow preventive safety guidelines to protect yourself and others, and you meet CDC criteria for no longer being infectious ([CDC link](#)).

If you test negative for COVID-19 antibodies, you probably did not have a previous infection. However, you could have been very recently infected. This means you could still spread the virus to others if you have been exposed to the virus recently, since antibodies don't show up for 1 to 3 weeks after infection ([CDC link](#)). We recommend that you wait to have sex with you partner until you are sure that you have recovered either through (1) taking a viral test to determine if you are still contagious and (2) following CDC symptom and timeline guidelines ([CDC link](#)).



I tested positive for COVID-19 but am now recovered. When can I have sex with my household partner?

If you tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and you have not had a test to determine if you are still contagious, it is not safe to have sex unless these three things have happened: (1) you have not had a fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers), (2) other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved), and (3) 10 days have passed after symptoms first started ([CDC link](#)). After these three things have all happened, you can be considered "recovered" and safe to have sex with your partner.

If you have had a test to determine if you are still contagious, and the test determines that you are not, it is still safer to have sex after these three things have happened: (1) you no longer have a fever for at least 72 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers), (2) other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved), (3) you received two negative tests in a row, at least 24 hours apart ([CDC link](#)). After these three things have all happened, you can be considered "recovered" and safe to have sex with your partner.



I am an older adult and/or have underlying health conditions. What should I do about sex right now?

If you are older (e.g., over 50 years of age) and/or have one or more underlying health condition that puts you at risk for severe illness from the COVID-19 virus ([CDC link](#)), you should be extra careful during this time, including following all preventative guidelines and staying home and away from other people as much as possible ([CDC link](#)). If you have a sex partner who lives with you, discuss the importance of staying at least 6 feet away from others outside the household, washing hands often, and wearing a face mask or cloth face coverings in public settings. Have discussions with your partner about his/her sexual practices, as this could change your level of risk.

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In addition, the safest choice is not to have sex with a partner outside your household at this time. However, if you decide to have sex with a partner outside of your household, consider “sheltering in place together,” which means being socially distant (6 feet of physical space or greater) from everyone besides your sex partner. It also means being monogamous and following all other preventative guidelines with your partner ([CDC link](#)) in an effort to minimize your risk of infection.

Because you are an older adult and/or have underlying health condition(s), consider the following measures during sex for which there is some evidence to lower your potential risk:

- ✓ Avoid kissing
- ✓ Wear a face mask or cloth face covering and ask your partner to do the same
- ✓ Always use condoms to reduce your contact with saliva, semen and feces during anal and oral sex



PARTNERS OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

What about sex with a new partner? This person does not live with me.

If you would like to start a new relationship, just met someone you’d like to have sex with, or want to engage in casual sex and/or hookups, the risks should be considered very carefully. CDC recommends practicing social distancing at this time to protect your health during this pandemic, and having sex with a person not in your immediate household does not comply with recommendations for social distancing ([CDC link](#)). The safest choice is to not to have sex with a person outside your household at this time.

However, if you are considering having sex with a person outside your household, here are some questions you can ask yourself about your and your partner’s risk for spreading or acquiring the COVID-19 virus:

- Do I or my partner have a job that does not allow us to socially distance from others ([CDC link](#))?
- Am I or my partner elderly, and/or have underlying health conditions?
- Are my partner and I consistently complying with all preventive safety guidelines, including social distancing ([CDC link](#))?
- Am I or my partner showing any signs of illness from the COVID-19 virus ([CDC link](#))?
- Do I or my partner have any other sex partners at this time?
- Do I or my partner live in an area of high community transmission?

If you consider your risk low and decide to have sex with a person who lives outside your household, there are a few steps you can follow for which there is some evidence for safer sex:

- ✓ Avoid kissing
- ✓ Wear a face mask or cloth face covering and ask your partner to do the same
- ✓ Always use condoms to reduce your contact with saliva, semen and feces during anal and oral sex
- ✓ Reduce the number of sexual partners you have overall, and/or at the same time
- ✓ Have discussions about what you and your partner are doing to socially distance and protect yourselves and others while outside your household
- ✓ Remember that STDs and HIV are preventable. Follow these steps to protect yourself and your partners ([STD link](#)).



I have a partner who does not live with me. We have each agreed to practice social distancing except from each other (“sheltering in place together”). Is it safe to have sex?

“Sheltering in place together” means that you and your sex partner have decided to be socially distant (6 feet of physical

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space or greater) from everyone besides each other. You have also decided to be monogamous and follow all other preventative safety guidelines together ([CDC link](#)) in an effort to minimize your risk of infection.

Regardless of your decision to shelter in place together, sex should be considered very carefully because you live in different households. It is safest not to have sex with a person outside your household. CDC recommends practicing social distancing at this time to protect your health during this pandemic, and sex with a person not in your immediate household does not comply with recommendations for social distancing ([CDC link](#)).

However, as you shelter in place together, here are some questions you can ask yourself about your and your sex partner's risk for spreading or acquiring the COVID-19 virus:

- Am I or my partner elderly, and/or have underlying health conditions?
- Am I or my partner showing any signs of illness from the COVID-19 virus ([CDC link](#))?
- Do I or my partner live in an area of high community transmission?

If you consider your risk low and decide to have sex with your partner, there are a few steps you can follow for which there is some evidence for safer sex:

- ✓ Avoid kissing
- ✓ Wear a face mask or cloth face covering and ask your partner to do the same
- ✓ Always use condoms to reduce your contact with saliva, semen and feces during anal and oral sex



I am in a long-term committed relationship with a partner who does not live with me. What should we do about sex?

Sex and physical intimacy are a key part of life, especially when you are in a relationship, but at this time sex should be considered very carefully because you live in different households. CDC recommends practicing social distancing to protect your health during this pandemic, and sex with a person not in your immediate household does not comply with recommendations for social distancing ([CDC link](#)). The safest choice is to not to have sex with a person outside your household at this time.

However, if you are considering having sex with your partner, here are some questions you can ask yourself about your and your partner's risk for spreading or acquiring the COVID-19 virus:

- Do I or my partner have a job that does not allow us to socially distance from others? ([CDC link](#))
- Am I or my partner elderly, and/or have underlying health conditions?
- Are my partner and I consistently complying with all preventive safety guidelines, including social distancing ([CDC link](#))?
- Am I or my partner showing any signs of illness from the COVID-19 virus ([CDC link](#))?
- Do I or my partner live in an area of high community transmission?

If you consider your risk low and decide to have sex with your partner, there are a few steps you can follow for which there is some evidence for safer sex:

- ✓ Avoid kissing
- ✓ Wear a face mask or cloth face covering and ask your partner to do the same
- ✓ Always use condoms to reduce your contact with saliva, semen and feces during anal and oral sex



TELL YOUR SEX PARTNER(S) IF YOU TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 OR IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

If you test positive for the COVID-19 virus or think that you have the COVID-19 virus but cannot get tested, contact any sex partners and tell them that they need to: (1) stay home until 14 days after last exposure and maintain social distance (at least 6 feet) from others at all times, and (2) self-monitor for symptoms, including fever, cough and shortness of breath and check temperature twice a day. ([CDC link](#)). Your partners should also avoid contact with people at higher risk for severe illness (unless they live in the same home and had the same exposure) and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop ([CDC link](#)).

¹ Qiu L, Liu X, Xiao M, et al. SARS-CoV-2 is not detectable in the vaginal fluid of women with severe COVID-19 infection. Clin Infect Dis. 2020.

² Fan C, Lei D, Fang C, et al. Perinatal Transmission of COVID-19 Associated SARS-CoV-2: Should We Worry? Clin Infect Dis. 2020.

³ Cui P, Chen Z, Wang T, et al. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 detection in the female lower genital tract, Am J Obstet Gynecol. 2020.

⁴ Li D, Jin M, Bao P, et al. Clinical characteristics and results of semen tests among men with coronavirus disease 2019. JAMA Netw Open. 2020;3:e208292.

⁵ Wang W, Xu Y, Gao R, et al. Detection of SARS-CoV-2 in different types of clinical specimens. JAMA. 2020.

⁶ Chen Y, Chen L, Deng Q, et al. The presence of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in the feces of COVID-19 patients. J Med Virol. 2020.

⁷ Turban JL, Keuroghlian AS, Mayer KH. Sexual Health in the SARS-CoV-2 Era. An of Intern Med. 2020.

⁸ Wang W, Xu Y, Gao R, et al. Detection of SARS-CoV-2 in different types of clinical specimens. JAMA. 2020.

⁹ Howard J, Huang A, Tufekci Z, et al. Face masks against COVID-19: An evidence review. Preprints. 2020.

¹⁰ Greenhalgh T, Schmid MB, Cypionka T, Bassler D, Gruer L. Face masks for the public during the covid-19 crisis. BMJ. 2020

¹¹ Smith DK, Herbst JH, Zhang X, Rose CE. JAIDS. 2015.

¹² Kirkaldy RD, King BA, Brooks JT. COVID-19 and postinfection immunity: limited evidence, many remaining questions. JAMA. 2020.

* Please note that the risk for spreading and acquiring the COVID-19 virus may vary based on the type of oral sex: vaginal, oral or anal. Research is ongoing to further detail the level of risk via sex above and beyond the risk of respiratory transmission.