

COVID-19

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Safer Sex

Recent Updates:

1/11/21: Updated to reflect new policy requiring quarantine for 10 days and self-check for symptoms from Day 11 to Day 14 after known exposure.

11/10/20: Updated isolation, quarantine and close contact definitions as well as information related to how the infection is spread and how to protect yourself.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is asking everyone to do their part to help stop the surge of COVID-19 in Los Angeles County. To do this, we ask all residents to stay home as much as possible and to limit contact with others to slow the spread of COVID-19.

But what about sex?

Sex is a healthy, normal human activity, and a way to have fun without leaving your home. It is important that you practice safer sex in new ways during this pandemic. Here are some tips for how to enjoy sex while avoiding spread of COVID-19.

1. Know how COVID-19 spreads.

- **You can get COVID-19 from a person who has it.**
 - The virus spreads through particles in the saliva, mucus or respiratory droplets of people with COVID-19, even from people who do not have symptoms.
 - For people who do get symptoms, they can start to spread the virus to others two days before they feel any symptoms.
- **We still have a lot to learn about COVID-19 and sex.**
 - We do not know if COVID-19 can be spread through vaginal or anal sex.
 - The virus has been found in the semen and feces (poop) of people with COVID-19.

2. Have sex with people close to you.

- **You are your safest sex partner.** Masturbation will not spread COVID-19. Be sure to wash your hands (and any sex toys) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after sex.
- **The next safest partner is someone you live with.** Having close contact — including sex — with only a small circle of people helps prevent spreading COVID-19.
- **You should limit close contact — including sex — with anyone outside your household.** If you do have sex with others outside of your household, have as few partners as possible and pick partners you trust. Talk about COVID-19 risk factors before you have sex just as you would discuss PrEP, condoms, and other safer sex topics. Ask them about COVID-19 before you hook up.
 - **Do they have symptoms, or have they had symptoms in the last 14 days?** Cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath are some of the symptoms to ask about. Visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare for a detailed list of symptoms. But asking about symptoms is not a perfect way to know whether someone has COVID-19 because many people who have COVID-19 don't have symptoms and can still spread the virus.
 - **Have they been diagnosed with COVID-19?** People who tested positive but have recovered from

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COVID-19 and are past the isolation period (at least 10 days from the start of symptoms plus 24 hours with improved symptoms and no fever) are probably not infectious anymore. Someone who tested positive and has never had symptoms but is not past the 10-day isolation period could pass the virus to you.

- **Think twice about joining a play party.** Gatherings with people outside of your household are not allowed right now. Close contact with multiple people must be avoided. *Below are tips to reduce your risk of spreading or getting COVID-19:*
 - *Stick with one sex partner.*
 - *Pick larger, more open, and well-ventilated spaces.*
 - *Wear a face covering, avoid kissing, and do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.*
 - *Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.*
 - **If you usually meet your sex partners online or make a living by having sex,** take a break from in-person dates. Video dates, sexting, subscription-based fan platforms, sexy “Zoom parties” or chat rooms may be options for you.
 - **If you decide to have sex outside of your circle of contacts or a hook up, you will need to stay home and away from others for 10 full days from the last contact, and:**
 - Closely monitor yourself for symptoms.
 - Consider getting tested on a more frequent basis.
 - Be extra careful around people who are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness such as people over 65 years of age or those with serious medical conditions.
 - Be sure to wear a face covering and wash your hands often to limit risk to others.
 - See the *Home Quarantine Instructions for Close Contacts to COVID-19* (ph.lacounty.gov/covid/quarantine) for more info.
- 3. If you had COVID-19 in the past it does not mean you cannot get it again.** A prior positive molecular test (nose swab or saliva) means you have had COVID-19 and may be less likely to be re-infected. We don’t know how strong that protection is or for how long it lasts. See the [public health webpage on testing](#) to learn more about these different tests.
- **Do not use these tests to make decisions about who you have sex with and what kind of sex you have.**
- 4. Take care during sex.**
- **Kissing can easily pass COVID-19.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts.
 - **Rimming (mouth on anus) might spread COVID-19.** Virus in feces may enter your mouth and could lead to infection.
 - **Wear a face covering or mask.** Maybe it’s your thing, maybe it’s not, but wearing a face covering that covers your nose and mouth is a good way to add a layer of protection during sex. Heavy breathing

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and panting can spread the virus further. If you or your partner have COVID-19 and don't know it, a mask can help stop the spread.

- **Experiment.** Be creative with sexual positions and physical barriers, like walls, that allow sexual contact while avoiding close face to face contact.
- **Masturbate together.** Use physical distance and face coverings to reduce the risk.
- **Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact with saliva, semen or feces** during oral or anal sex.
- **Washing up before and after sex is more important than ever.**
 - Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - Wash sex toys with soap and warm water.
 - Disinfect keyboards and touch screens that you share with others.

5. Skip sex if you or your partner are not feeling well.

- **If you or a partner feel sick**, avoid kissing, sex or any close contact with others.
- **If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19**, avoid close contact with anyone outside your household and follow LA County [guidance about quarantine](#). Visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine.
- **If you get symptoms that might be due to COVID-19**, you should stay at home, and call your doctor about the need for testing and isolation. If you have mild symptoms, you should be able to recover at home. Do not go to the doctor's office without calling first. For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare.
- **If you test positive for COVID-19, you must isolate yourself** for at least 10 days from when your symptoms first appeared AND at least 24 hours after your fever has gone without the use of medications AND your symptoms have improved. If you tested positive for COVID-19 but don't have any symptoms, you must stay home for 10 days after the test was taken. For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation.
- **If you test positive for COVID-19, be sure to tell all of your close contacts that they need to be in quarantine for 10 days after their last contact with you. They need to monitor their health and use precautions for an additional 4 days (total of 14 days).** Precautions include wearing a face covering at all times when around others, keeping 6 feet away from others, and regular hand washing. They should get tested for COVID-19 and will need to quarantine for the full 10 days even if their test is negative. Close contacts include anyone who was *within 6 feet of you for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, starting 2 days before your symptoms began until your isolation period ends*. It also includes anyone who had contact with your body fluids and/or secretions (such as were coughed on/sneezed on, shared utensils or saliva or provided care to you without wearing protective equipment). For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine.
- **If you or your partner has a medical condition that can lead to more severe COVID-19**, you should think about skipping sex.
 - Medical conditions that may increase risk include lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system (for example, having unsuppressed HIV and a low CD4 count).

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6. Prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy.

- **Condoms:** Condoms help prevent HIV and other STIs. For information on how to order free condoms, please visit lacondom.com/order-condoms.
- **PrEP and PEP:** Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post Exposure Prophylaxis both help prevent HIV. For more information about PrEP and PEP, visit getprepla.com.
- **HIV and STD Testing:** Getting tested for HIV and other STDs is an important way to protect your health. To find a place that offers HIV and STD testing near you, please visit gettested.cdc.gov.
- **HIV Care:** For people who are living with HIV, it is important to be in care. For information about HIV care, and maintaining an undetectable viral load, please visit getprotectedla.com/uu/get-hiv-treatment.
- **Birth Control:** Make sure you have an effective form of birth control for the coming weeks. Visit <https://www.bedsider.org/where-to-get-it> to find low and no cost birth control options near you.
- **Emergency Contraception:** Can be used to prevent pregnancy up to five days after unprotected sex. You can get some types, like Plan B, over the counter without a prescription at a drug store, grocery store (call ahead to see if is available) or online. For the copper IUD and Ella, you need to consult with a doctor, OBGYN, or clinic. To learn more, visit bedsider.org/methods/emergency-contraception.

For more information about COVID-19 in Los Angeles County, visit publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus.

Acknowledgments: “Safer Sex and COVID-19”, The NYC Health Department, June 8, 2020