

# SAFER SEX DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



**If you're dating and/or having sex with people outside of your bubble, we've compiled some harm reduction tips for safer sex during the times of COVID-19:**

- ✓ Wear a mask and/or avoid kissing.
- ✓ If you're not wearing a mask, get creative and choose positions that minimize face-to-face contact!
- ✓ The virus that causes COVID-19 has not yet been found in semen or vaginal fluid but it has been found in saliva, urine and feces – if you are hooking up with people, avoid swapping fluids (or solids for that matter) of any kind.
- ✓ Never share anything that touches your mouth: food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, vaping devices, joints, or bongs.
- ✓ Even if you're on another form of birth control, using condoms and dental dams are a good practice to minimize the exchange of fluids.
- ✓ Consider that intimacy comes in many forms, and suggest keeping your attraction strictly non-physical for now. Try Skype dates, or texting or calling each other.



**DO**

**KEEP YOUR MASKS ON!**



**DON'T**

**SWAP SPIT**



**DO**

**BE HONEST – LET YOUR PARTNER(S) KNOW IF YOU THINK YOU'RE SICK**



**DON'T**

**HIDE IN SHAME IF YOU TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19**

**If you earn an income through sex work and alternatives to meeting in person are not possible, there are additional steps you can take to keep yourself and your clients healthy and safe. For example:**

- ✓ Ask your client some screening questions, such as:
  - Have they recently travelled outside of Canada or had contact with someone who has traveled outside of the country?
  - Are they feeling sick in any way?
  - Have they been around others who have been sick (even if it's just through work)?
- ✓ If they say yes to any of them – it's a good idea to reschedule, for your safety and theirs.
- ✓ Even though you may want to, refrain from hugging or kissing colleagues and opt for air-kisses or fist bumps.
- ✓ After appointments, disinfect work surfaces and any materials that were used. As always, remember to clean and disinfect toys and other equipment as well.

## Getting Tested

- ✓ Remember to continue getting tested for STBBIs if you feel like you're a person who has a higher risk of being exposed. This is important for your health and doesn't stop during COVID.
- ✓ Many sexual health clinics aren't offering the same levels of service as they were before the pandemic hit – make sure you go online or call to check their hours and process before heading out to remove any risk of being turned away.
- ✓ If you're sleeping with someone new or just want to know, some sexual health clinics are offering "test and go" services where you can quickly do a test and have someone follow up with you if necessary. However, this isn't an option for people experiencing symptoms (i.e., funky/abnormal discharge, bumps or sores near your genitals or anus, burning when you pee).<sup>2</sup> If you have symptoms of an STBBI, reach out to your health care provider.
- ✓ Remember: if you do not feel well, stay home. If you had plans to get tested for an STBBI and don't feel well, it's important to contact where you were going to get tested and ask them how you should proceed.

## Stopping & Starting Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) COVID Style<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ During the pandemic, it's important to follow physical distancing guidelines, which means that in-person, casual hookups are strongly discouraged (especially with people you don't know, or who are outside your bubble).
- ✓ Some people who are on PrEP who are not planning on having sex for now are making the choice to take a break from taking it. If you're considering stopping (or have stopped and are planning on starting) PrEP, here's a few tips to follow:
  - **Before stopping:** Continue on PrEP for 7 sex-free days. After this, it's safe to stop.
  - **Before re-starting:** Take a daily dose of PrEP for seven days before you start having sex again. Continue with daily dosing and remember that it's really important to take the after sex doses!
- ✓ If you've had sex since stopping PrEP, and that sex involved any potential exposure to HIV, it's important to get tested BEFORE re-starting PrEP.

### Wait, what's PrEP?

Pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP is a medication taken daily that you can use to protect yourself from getting HIV. It's key to get on PrEP before you have a chance of being exposed to HIV!

### Why would I take that?

People take PrEP when they feel their risk of getting HIV is higher than they are comfortable with. For example:

- ✓ If you have sex partner(s) with HIV
- ✓ If you don't know the status of your sexual partner(s)
- ✓ If you share drug injection and/or tattoo equipment

## References:

1. BC Ministry of Health (2020). COVID-19 Guidance for Sex Workers. BC Center for Disease Control [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19\\_SexWorkersGuidance.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19_SexWorkersGuidance.pdf)
2. Ottawa Public Health. (2020). Test & Go. <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-services/test-and-go.aspx>
3. Prepster (2020). COVID-19 tips & tricks. <https://prepster.info/covid/stopping-and-starting-PrEP/>



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

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