

Safer Sex and COVID-19

Life might feel scary right now, full of unknowns and uncomfortable experiences. Social distancing is not easy, especially for young adults who are supposed to be enjoying the best years of their lives. Worst of all, being off campus means an infinite lack of Stall Street Journals. Do not worry – we've got you covered.

Introducing a very special Online/Pandemic/Sexy Edition of the Stall Street Journal:

COVID-19: What's Sex Got to Do with It?

Ah sex, something you probably never expected to experience in your parent's house again. Being socially distant has meant a large reframing of what we as college students think about sex. A lot more sexting, and a lot less parties. You may be thinking: I'm back at school, ready to enjoy the college experience once again, or perhaps for the first time. Can I have sex?

Unfortunately, we at Campus Health cannot give you a straight answer. What we can provide is a comprehensive and evidence-based guide to safer sex during the Coronavirus.

1. How is the Coronavirus spread?

Let's start with what we know. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease, so direct contact with saliva – through kissing, for example- can easily pass the virus. One of the largest issues with sexual intercourse during the pandemic is the need for direct touching. Unless you have figured out a way to have sex while maintaining the recommended six feet distance (in which case, please let us know), you cannot safely practice social distancing during intercourse.

- The CDC recommends six feet between people to slow the spread of the virus – viral particles are spread through respiratory droplets when people cough, sneeze and talk.
- While COVID-19 has not yet been found in vaginal fluid, it has been found in feces of people who are infected. So this means that rimming (oral/anal contact) and anal sex may spread COVID-19 as well. Remember that internal, external condoms and dental dams reduce contact with saliva and feces during anal and oral sex or oral/anal contact.
- Following these recommendations is especially important if you or your partner has a pre-existing condition which is known to result in the development of more serious COVID-19 complications. These conditions may be, but are not limited to:
 - Heart disease, diabetes, asthma or chronic lung disease, cancer, HIV, or another immunocompromising disease.

2. So, I should not have sex?

Not necessarily. There are many ways to have sex, and even during normal business hours each comes with their own set of risks which are personal and dependent on one's own values. Any sexual act involving direct genital (and sometimes oral) contact holds a possibility for STIs and any genital contact between a person with testes and a person with a uterus/ovaries may cause pregnancy. It is up to the people involved to determine what steps to take to minimize potential negative outcomes. These steps may include use of birth control, or other protection. COVID is a new factor that must be considered, and partners have the responsibility to discuss what they are comfortable with, now not only regarding STIs and pregnancy but also Coronavirus transmission.

3. But what if I really, *really* want to have penetrative sex and I am not living with my partner?

If you choose to have consensual sex with a partner, remember that contraceptives like internal, external condoms and dental dams are especially important. Currently, there is no evidence that both internal and external condoms can protect you from COVID-19. What we do know is that COVID-19 is especially dangerous in bodies that are fighting other infections and diseases. Keeping your body healthy by doing everything to avoid being infected with an STI or HIV can help protect you from a bad COVID-19 infection.

- What's the Deal with Dental Dams?: Click [here](#) to learn.
- Here are videos which can help you understand what [internal](#) and [external](#) condoms are, and how they're properly used!

4. Okay, is there anything that I *can* do?

Yes! While this experience may seem limiting, it has provided the opportunity to open your sex life to a plethora of new activities. From setting up photoshoots for nude photos, to playing fun games like strip bingo on Zoom, staying six feet apart does not have to be boring. One thing we have been enjoying over the past couple of months is finding new ways to enjoy masturbation!

- Given what we currently know about COVID-19 and how its transmitted, the safest sexual activity is solo or remote. You are your safest sexual partner. Touching yourself will not spread COVID-19 - just remember to wash your hands (and any sex toys) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after sexual activity. This is also a great time to figure out what you find pleasurable. It is a lot easier to communicate with a partner about your likes and dislikes if you know them yourself.
- Taking photos for a partner can also be an exciting way of staying connected during social distancing. If you and your partner(s) are unfamiliar with the best ways to sext, we have included this graphic which can help clear a few things up!
 - Here is a great [resource](#) for safer sexting.
- The next safest option is sex with someone you already live with, provided that person is consenting and also taking steps to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19 (like social distancing, hand washing, wearing a mask in public spaces).

5. If I am not interested in having sex, why should I care?

COVID-19 has not just made sexual relationships more difficult. Remember, always care for your platonic partners too. Make sure to check in with them regularly and interact in the ways you know how, like Zoom calls and movie dates. Being alone does not mean you have to be alone. Make time for friends just like you would a partner or significant other.

6. Relationships during COVID

Some of you may be thinking, "Sex?! Are you kidding? My partner is driving me crazy!" You're not alone. Even couples with healthy, strong relationships may find themselves under strain during this time – struggling with being confined 24/7 under stay-at-home orders. Others may be pressed because of distance, forced to live apart due to health concerns or quarantine. If you're feeling the stress, there are resources to help. You can get [tips on how to respect and help one another and disagree fairly](#). If you need more support, you can [find a Tulane counselor](#) who can offer virtual/telehealth support.

COVID-19 restrictions can be particularly dangerous for those in abusive relationships. The National Sexual Health Coalition suggests taking specific steps to stay safe in this situation, including making some space between you and your abuser by taking walks or a drive if possible and they also suggest making an a safety plan and having an emergency bag ready in case you need to leave your home

quickly. Loveisrespect.org has an [Interactive Guide to Safety Planning](#) that can take you a series of steps and identify your safety options.

7. Okay, I am too lazy to read all of this. Can you just summarize it for me? Yes! Click [HERE!](#)

We hope you find comfort and empowerment in this guide to support you in managing your sexual health and wellbeing during this time. We know that it can be scary and confusing right now, but remember, better days are ahead. We hope these suggested resources help to inspire change, and creativity. If you have any questions or lingering thoughts regarding sexual health during COVID-19, please do not hesitate to reach out. Tulane Campus Health is always here for you!