

Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM), Sexual Health and COVID-19

COVID-19 and You

In this extraordinary time, we need to be extra vigilant about our health and well-being. In order to avoid infection with the COVID-19 please follow the 'physical distance' two-metre guidelines outlined on the HSE website: www.hse.ie/coronavirus. Also in various languages at: www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-translated-resources/

COVID-19 and HIV

People with HIV are not at any increased risk of contracting the corona virus. The same 'physical distance' guidelines apply to us all. Once infected, COVID-19 provides increased risk to the elderly (over 60's); those with an underlying long-term medical condition; and those with a weakened immune system. If you are HIV+ on treatment and undetectable, you are not considered to have a weakened immune system. Take advice from your treating clinic about managing your HIV treatment and monitoring symptoms. If you are HIV+ and not on medication or not undetectable it is particularly important that you follow the 'physical distance guidelines' strictly. (See www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html). If you are on anti-HIV treatment or PrEP do not assume that it protects you from COVID-19.

Sex and COVID-19

Safer sex remains the best advice to protect yourself from HIV transmission and other STI's. COVID-19 is not an STI. You can get COVID-19 from a person who has it when they cough or sneeze near you. It can also be spread through direct contact with saliva or mucus and faeces. It is very important that you avoid sex and especially kissing if you or your partner is not feeling well with symptom of COVID-19 e.g. fever, cough or shortness of breath. It is important to wash your hands (and sex toys) before and after sex. Wash hands regularly, before eating and after using the toilet.

However, couples living in the same household may decide to continue to have sex as a vital part of their relationship. Keeping intimate sexual contact to your household circle reduces the risk. However, it remains a risk. Kissing and rimming can spread the virus.

If you or your partner develop symptoms you should self-isolate immediately and phone your doctor for further advice.

Sex is a vital part of all of our lives, and it can help to maintain positive mental and physical health. For those of us not in a live-in relationship, **we are being asked to take extraordinary measures for a short time**. However difficult and frustrating it may be for us, we have to adapt our sexual expression to take account of COVID-19 transmission routes. The safest sex partner is yourself. Exploring fantasies with or without the help of internet or media hook-ups can help provide remote stimulation and satisfaction. 'We are in this together'. The best advice is to adhere to the physical distance guidelines outlined at www.hse.ie/coronavirus and further information on Sex

Coronavirus COVID-19



and COVID-19 by the HSE at www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sex-and-coronavirus/. The man2man.ie website and its Facebook page is updated regularly, and as new information emerges. Please note that there are currently severe restrictions on STI, HIV and PrEP services. See map and list of services at <http://bit.ly/sti-service-restrictions>

For further information contact Bill Foley at info@ghn.ie

Gay Health Network (GHN) operates the www.man2man.ie STI and HIV education and prevention programme in partnership with the HSE. We provide information and support for gay men, bisexual men, transmen and men who have sex with men (MSM).

The poster for this statement is also available at:
www.gayhealthnetwork.ie/news and www.man2man.ie/resources

COVID-19 information is available in various languages at:
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-translated-resources/>

For more information on coronavirus and sex please see:
HIV Ireland's MPOWER Programme
<https://www.hivireland.ie/what-we-do/mpower/sexual-health-and-covid-19/>
New York City Health. Sex and Coronavirus Disease 2019. (COVID-19)
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-sex-guidance.pdf>

For People Living with HIV:

HIV Ireland: <https://www.hivireland.ie/living-with-hiv/hiv-and-covid-19/>

UNAIDS: <https://www.unaids.org/en/covid19>

For more information on sexual health and wellbeing:
<http://man2man.ie/>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/>

Note:

This information was last updated on 30th March 2020 and is subject to change depending on evolving restrictions and evidence linked to COVID-19.