

How Can LGBTQ+ Youth Navigate COVID-19?

1. How can I get COVID-19?

- When a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or talks, they can spread the virus. This occurs when people are in close contact with each other (within about 6 feet).
 - What does six feet look like? When you extend your arms on both sides from finger tip to finger tip—it's about the same length as your height. To be safe, keep three arm spans between you and someone else.
- When you touch a surface that was recently touched by someone with COVID-19.
- The virus can be shared through saliva or mucus. This means it could be shared through kissing.
- The virus has been found in the feces of some people who are infected. So, the virus might be spread through sexual activity that includes using the mouth or tongue on the butt or anus of a partner.
- You or your partner could be infected with COVID-19, but not have any symptoms. And you could still spread the virus.
- You can help avoid infection by wearing a mask when in public, physical distancing (staying six feet away from others), and washing your hands regularly.
- **If you have symptoms that could be from COVID-19, talk with a healthcare provider about getting tested for the virus.** You can contact your local health department or healthcare provider about testing locations. If you have COVID-19, be sure to tell your partners, either in person or online.

2. How can I keep my relationship(s) strong during COVID-19?

- If you're on stay at home or safer at home orders, keeping relationships strong can be tough. Some of you might be spending a lot more time together, while others are spending a lot more time apart. Either way, you can take steps to stay connected.
 - **For some of you, romantic relationships are an important part of life.** With COVID-19, you might have to make some changes, but keeping up healthy relationships is still possible through steady communication, virtual connection, and physical-distanced hangouts.
 - **If you and your partner are living apart, this can be difficult.** It's key to stay in touch and connected. You could do so through phone calls, texting, online video dates, or virtually watching movies or playing games.

- **Kindness and understanding are key.** For most of us, this is a stressful time with COVID-19. Many of us are living in close quarters, we might be anxious, and our daily lives have changed. Remember to be patient and forgiving with yourself and your partner(s).
- **Communication is key.** It's normal to disagree from time-to-time, but it's important to talk about solutions. This means calmly explaining why you are upset, and focusing on specific behaviors or examples. Check out the Five Action Steps for more tips: <https://www.fiveactionsteps.org/4>.
- If you are struggling in your relationships and want more support, consider online counseling, through phone, or in-person (if available in your community). Visit The Trevor Project (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>) or Q Chat Space (<https://www.qchatspace.org/>).

3. What about safer sex and partners during COVID-19?

- **You are your safest sex partner.** Masturbation is safe and can be very pleasurable. This is a great time to explore what feels good to you. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after masturbation; the same goes for sex toys. (Note: Learning what you are and are not comfortable with can help make it more comfortable and pleasurable if you are intimate with someone).
- **Remember, if you're close enough to touch an infected partner, you're close enough to get the virus.** This could happen when doing things like hugging, talking face-to-face, holding hands, or just sitting together.
- **If you are not living together and are under stay at home/safer at home orders, it's best to avoid close contact and sexual activity with your partner(s) for now.** Instead stay connected via video dates, over social media, and meeting up for "distanced" hangouts at 6 feet apart. And even if your area is loosening up restrictions, it's still a good idea to assess risk and take steps to avoid infection.
- **If you decide you want to have close contact or be intimate with a partner, it's key to assess your risk and take steps to reduce it.** This applies to partners who live together and to those who live apart. Here are some questions to help you do so:
 - 1) Are you and your partner following guidelines for social distancing, handwashing, and wearing a mask?
 - 2) Could you or your partner have been exposed to the virus (at work, on transit, at home)?
 - 3) Have you had COVID-19 or any COVID-19 symptoms?
 - 4) If either of you are at risk, you should decide together if you want to avoid sexual activity for now.
- **Consent during COVID-19: You always have a right to decide what you do with your body and in your relationships.** If you are nervous about being in close contact with your partner and don't want to do so at this time, it's important to tell your partner. You can remind your partner that wanting to keep physical distance does not mean you are not invested, or can't be connected emotionally. Consent is so important, and you have every right to say no to something you don't want to do.

- If you decide to engage in sexual activity with a partner, you can take steps to reduce risk of COVID-19. You can avoid kissing; avoiding using the mouth or tongue on butt or anus of a partner (rimming); use condoms and/or dental dams during oral or anal sex; and engage in mutual masturbation (masturbate on your own, but together).
- **Interested in dating someone new?** For now, it's best to avoid in-person dates. Instead, get to know them online, or through video dates. This slow build-up could lay a great foundation for a future relationship. *Note: No one should pressure you to share images that you don't want to. Be careful sharing images since they could be recorded and/or shared with others. If you're under age 18, it is illegal to share explicit images.*
<https://www.insider.com/how-to-sext-safely-experts-2019-4>
- To learn more about safer sex in general, please see this [LGBTQIA Safe Sex Guide](#) developed by Healthline in partnership with [Advocates for Youth](#) and [GLSEN](#).

4. How can I stay mentally healthy during this stressful time?

- **It's important to keep a balance between decisions for your mental and physical health.** We know that LGBTQ people are at greater risk of mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, and they can get worse during physical distancing. If you have access to a phone, internet, and/or social media, stay connected with friends and family.
- **Carve out time for yourself.** Be sure to spend some time on your own, and do things that you enjoy. For example, taking a walk, reading, doing art, talking with friends, listening to your favorite music, or just watching a favorite TV show or movie.
- **Stay socially connected during physical distancing:** Combating feelings of isolation during physical distancing can be done through virtual community. GLSEN is working to provide virtual opportunities for [supportive educators](#) and [LGBTQ youth](#) to connect. Follow GLSEN on Facebook and Instagram @GLSEN and @GLSEN_Education for more updates. Educators can sign up for our newsletter at www.glsen.org/educators and join our [Facebook Forum](#) to stay connected to other educators and to learn more about our monthly webinar offerings.
- **If you're in a home where you're not out, or with family members who are unsupportive,** being under stay at home or safer at home orders can be even more challenging. Know that you are not alone. If you have access to the internet, staying connected through the virtual community ideas we've listed above can be especially useful during shelter in place regulations. If possible, find time for yourself and find places in your home that are safe and just for you.
 - **If possible, try to make a plan to minimize your risk.** For example, find the safest room or area in your living space that you can escape to if there are signs that violence or verbal abuse may occur.
 - **Think about putting a buddy system in place.** Designate one or two trusted people outside of your home that you can contact with a code word to let them know when you are in trouble and need help.

- If you are being misgendered at home, remember that you and your identity are valid. Here are some [affirmations for folks struggling with pronouns](#).
- If you are having suicidal thoughts or need more immediate support, contact [the Trevor Project](#).

5. Can I still access sexual and gender-affirming health care services?

- Taking care of your sexual health is important, even during COVID-19. Services could include STI testing and treatment, birth control, HIV care and treatment, and reproductive health care. How you receive this care might vary during this time.
- For routine sexual health care, many health care providers are using phone and video appointments (telehealth). This “no-touch” care reduces contact with other people, and the risk of getting COVID-19. Some providers are also offering in-person visits. Check with your local health care provider, health department, clinic, or hospital to see what sexual health services are available near you.
- In-person care and treatment are usually still available for people who have symptoms, are undergoing treatment, and/or have emergencies.
- To help you find LGBTQ-friendly health care providers, check out: https://glmimpak.networkats.com/staff_online/staff/main/home.asp.
- To learn more about telehealth, visit: <https://www.hrc.org/blog/telemedicine-and-covid-19-tips-for-the-lgbtq-community>.
- To learn more about COVID-19 and your sexual health: https://nationalcoalitionforsexualhealth.org/sexual-health/NCSH_COVID19-and-Sexual-Health_Services.pdf.

Gender-Affirming Services

- We know that for many people, gender-affirming surgeries have been postponed at this time, and access to hormones can be more challenging, especially if you are navigating this without a supportive family member.
- To learn more about transgender care and services, you can explore these resources:
 - [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
 - [The Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guide](#)
 - [Blog Post: “Surgeries Postponed During COVID-19”](#)

This factsheet was co-developed by GLSEN and the National Coalition for Sexual Health.