



Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



COVID-19: Guidance for Sex Workers

Updated: May 12, 2020

We recognize that many sex workers continue to meet clients in-person and acknowledge the support sex workers are providing each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. The BC Centre for Disease Control and the Ministry of Health have developed this guidance with a harm reduction lens to help reduce the risks associated with in-person contact and to keep workers as well as clients safe from COVID-19 illness.

Risks of COVID-19 related to sex work

- SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 illness and other health problems. In the context of a global COVID-19 pandemic, B.C. has implemented a number of public health measures to prevent the spread of the virus.
- The COVID-19 virus can be spread to people who are within 2 metres (about 6 ft) of a person who is infected when that person coughs or sneezes.
- The COVID-19 virus can also be passed by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the face, eyes, nose, or mouth.
- The COVID-19 virus has been found in saliva, respiratory fluids, urine and feces. While SARS-CoV-2 has been detected in semen, more research is needed to determine if the virus can be transmitted sexually.

General Recommendations

- Wash hands regularly with plain soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content. Antibacterial soap is NOT required
- Cough into your elbow or cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you sneeze. Immediately dispose of all used tissues in an appropriate waste bin and wash your hands right away
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Do not share food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, vaping devices, joints, or bongs
- Do not work if you have flu-like symptoms, for example, cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat, difficulty breathing

Before a date

- Consider including questions about symptoms, contact with sick individuals, and travel in the client screening process



- Wash your hands with plain soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content
- Encourage clients to wash their hands/face
- If facilities are available, encourage clients to shower
- Disinfect work surfaces and any materials that were used with alcohol (at least 60%), bleach, hydrogen peroxide, or soap and water.

Practice Safer Sex Work

Avoid	Instead try...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● in-person sex work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● web-based, phone-based, or text-based services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● kissing, saliva exchange ● mouth contact on skin ● putting objects in your mouth (including your fingers) that have touched the client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● erotic massage, strip-tease ● positions that minimize face-to-face contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● direct contact with bodily fluids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● condoms, dental dams, and gloves

After a Date

- Wash your hands with plain soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Wash work surfaces and any materials that were used with soap and water, and then disinfect with dilute bleach solution, hydrogen peroxide or alcohol wipes. Wear gloves when handling disinfecting products especially bleach.
- When disinfecting, open a window so the fumes from the products don't aggravate your throat or breathing.
- To dilute bleach, use room temperature water, not hot water. See bleach mixing instruction below, allow the surface to remain wet for one minute.
- Do not mix bleach with vinegar or other acids, ammonia, cleaning solutions, or rubbing alcohol. This can create toxic gases or corrosive materials that can cause damage.
- If soap and water are not available, disinfectant solutions should be sufficient if the surface is not visibly soiled.
- Wash and dry sheets and towels in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest possible water settings. Dry all items thoroughly



List of disinfecting agents and their working concentrations known to be effective against coronaviruses^{1,2} :

Agent and concentration	Uses
1. 1:100 dilution Chlorine: household bleach – sodium hypochlorite (5.25%)* 10 ml bleach to 990 ml water	Used for disinfecting surfaces (e.g., hand railings, grab handles, door knobs, cupboard handles). Make fresh daily and allow surface to air dry naturally.
2. 1:50 dilution Chlorine: household bleach - sodium hypochlorite (5.25%)* 20 ml bleach to 980 ml water	Used for disinfecting surfaces contaminated with bodily fluids and waste like vomit, diarrhoea, mucus, or feces (after cleaning with soap and water first). Make fresh daily and allow surface to air dry naturally.
3. Hydrogen Peroxide 0.5%	Used for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces (e.g., counters, hand rails, door knobs).
4. Quaternary Ammonium Compounds (QUATs): noted as 'alkyl dimethyl ammonium chlorides' on the product label	Used for disinfecting surfaces (e.g., floors, walls, furnishings).

¹ Dellanno, Christine, Quinn Vega, and Diane Bosenberg. "The antiviral action of common household disinfectants and antiseptics against murine hepatitis virus, a potential surrogate for SARS coronavirus." *American journal of infection control* 37.8 (2009): 649-652.

² Provincial Infection Prevention Control Network of British Columbia. "Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Providing Healthcare to Clients Living in the Community." (2014). https://www.picnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/PICNet_Home_and_Community_Care_Guidelines_2014_.pdf

Accessing COVID-19 Testing

- For most up to date information, see the [testing page](#) or use the [self-assessment tool](#)

STI Testing

- Due to COVID-19, most STI clinics have reduced hours, are not offering routine testing, and are only seeing clients with symptoms or urgent needs. Call ahead to check.
- [Get Checked Online](#) is available for referral to LifeLabs locations, which may have reduced hours due to COVID-19

Suggestions for clients

- Stay home if you have symptoms, have had contact with individuals who are confirmed cases of COVID-19, or have travelled within the last 14 days and do not engage in physical sexual encounters.
- Use the [BC COVID-19 Symptoms Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if you may need further assessment or testing for COVID-19

Additional Resources

- COVID-19 and Sex Work
 - [Sex Work and COVID-19](#)
 - [Navigating COVID-19 for Sex Workers & Allies: Info & Support Guide](#)



- [COVID-19 and substance use](#)
- STI Testing
 - [GetCheckedOnline](#)
 - [12th Avenue Clinic](#)
- [WISH](#) or call 604-669-9474
 - [MAP Outreach Van](#) (window-service only). Call or text 604-720-5686
 - [Bad Date Reporting](#)
- [PACE Society](#) or call 604-872-7651
 - [Pace Sex Worker Relief Fund](#)
- [SWAN](#) or call or text 719 6343 or 778 865 6343
- [PEERS](#)
- [HUSTLE \(self identified men, non-binary, and two-spirit\)](#)
- BC Centre for Disease Control [COVID-19 information](#)

