

# Reducing sexually associated transmission of COVID-19 in men who have sex with men (MSM)



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# Conflicts of Interest

- None relevant to this presentation

## Reducing sexually associated transmission of COVID-19 in men who have sex with men

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### ABSTRACT

Believed to be zoonotic in origin, COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus subtype, which spreads from person to person through droplet transmission. As of late April, 2020, 895,766 cases of COVID-19 infections were recorded in the United States. This infection was responsible for 50,439 deaths. Because of close, person-to-person proximity, coupled with possible contact with body fluids, transmission of COVID-19 during sexual activity is possible. However, some activities carry higher risks of transmission than others. This article explores the risks of COVID-19 transmission associated with kissing, oral sex (fellatio and anilingus), and anal receptive and anal insertive intercourse among men who have sex with men (MSM). Recommendations for counseling MSM on safer sexual decision-making, many of which are applicable in the general prevention of sexually transmitted infections, are also provided. Nurse practitioners can serve as advocates in preventing sexually associated COVID-19 communication in MSM and contribute to the advancement of this continuously evolving area of public health science.

**Keywords:** Bisexual; coronavirus; COVID-19; gay; homosexual; men who have sex with men; SARS-CoV-2.

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**12.31.19**

Officials in Wuhan, China reported dozens of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause.

**1.13.20**

The first case outside of China was reported in Thailand.

**1.30.20**

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern."

**1.7.20**

Chinese officials identified the novel coronavirus.

**1.21.20**

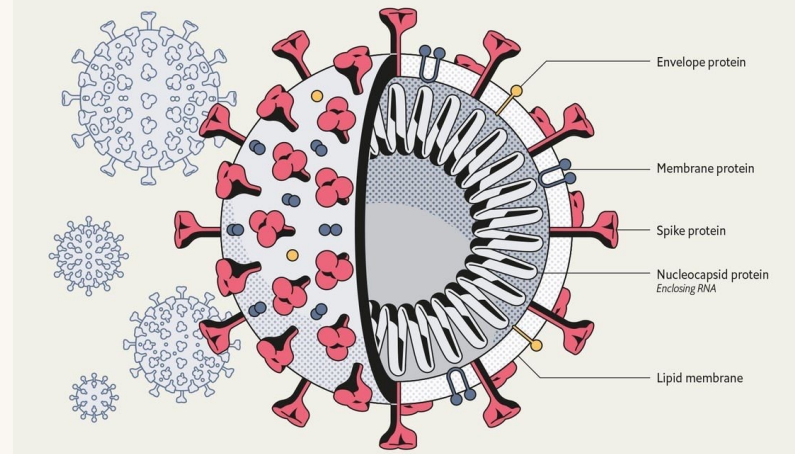
The U.S. announced the first confirmed case in Washington state.

**2.6.20**

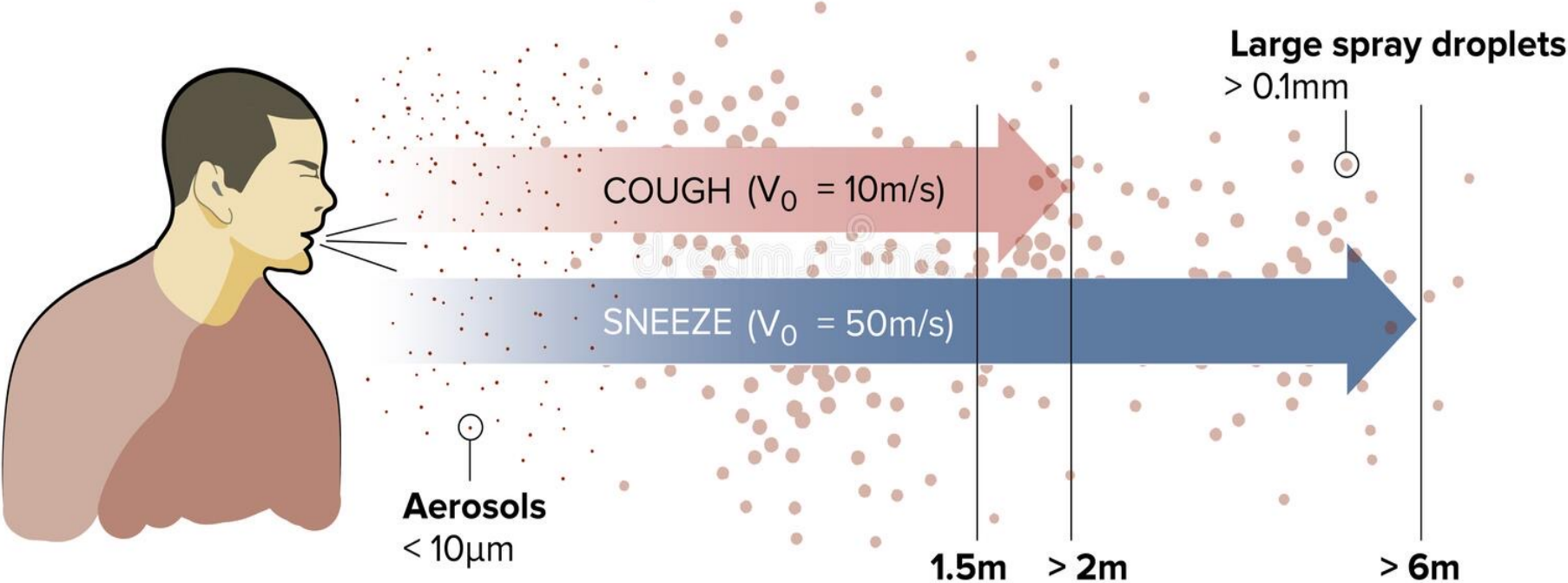
The first death on American soil occurred in California.

**3.11.20**

WHO declared the outbreak a pandemic.



# SARS-CoV-2 Transmission



# Sexual Transmission of SARS-CoV-2

- **Bhattacharya et al. (2021)** reviewed 13 studies
  - SARS-CoV-2 was *recovered* in semen during COVID-19 recovery
  - No evidence that the SARS-CoV-2 was *transmitted* through semen
- **Tur-Kaspa et al. (2021)** reviewed 47 qual. and 23 quant. molecular detection studies of SARS-CoV-2 RNA, which were *negative* in:
  - 100.0% (89/89) prostatic fluid samples
  - 98.0% (293/299) seminal fluid samples
  - 94.1% (16/17) testicular biopsies

# BOTTOM LINE



SARS-CoV-2  
is **not** an STI

# Why should clinicians care about SARS-CoV-2 transmission among MSM?

- MSM (CDC, 2018)
  - Have greater number of sexual partners
  - Engage in riskier sexual behaviors and substance use
  - Present higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Barrier methods against STIs do not protect against droplet exchange
- Most sexual activities occur with individuals closer than 2 m (6 ft)





A woman is shown in profile, facing left, eating a banana. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights her face and the banana. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Fellatio

- Varying evidence of SARS-CoV-2 present in, but not successfully transmitted through semen
- Anatomic proximity to the perianal area poses risk of transmission through fecal contamination

# Anilingus

- Zhang et al. (2021) pooled 35 studies with 1636 subjects
  - 43% prevalence of fecal RNA
  - After loss of respiratory RNA, 27% had persistent fecal shedding
  - Fecal shedding (21.8 days) lasts longer than respiratory shedding (14.7 days)

# Fisting

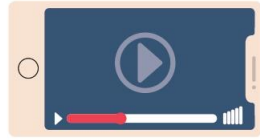
- **Cappelletti et al. (2016)** pooled 14 studies
  - External anal and/or genital trauma observed in 22.2% of consensual and 88.8% of nonconsensual subjects
  - Internal injuries are observed in 100% of subjects
- **Donnadieu-Rigole et al. (2020)** pooled 83 studies
  - Chemsex is prevalent in 3% to 31% of the studies
  - Chemsex may impair decision-making
  - Association of chemsex with riskier behaviors, including fisting

# Anal Intercourse

- **Garcia-Iglesias & Ledin (2021)** conducted an online ethnography of barebackers (i.e., MSM who eroticize condomless anal intercourse)
  - COVID-19 has impacted perceptions of sex, relationships, and community politics
  - Sexual subcultures and practices are evolving under the uncertain conditions of the 'new normality' of COVID-19

# Preventative Practices

Garcia-Iglesias & Ledin (2021):  
*Don't be a covidiot!*

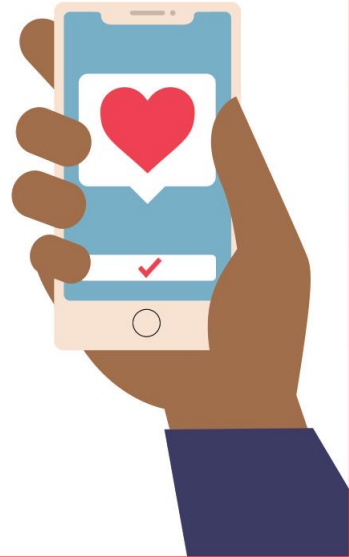


## You are your safest sex partner

Masturbate, use toys. Take this time to find out what makes you feel good.

## Get off while maintaining your distance

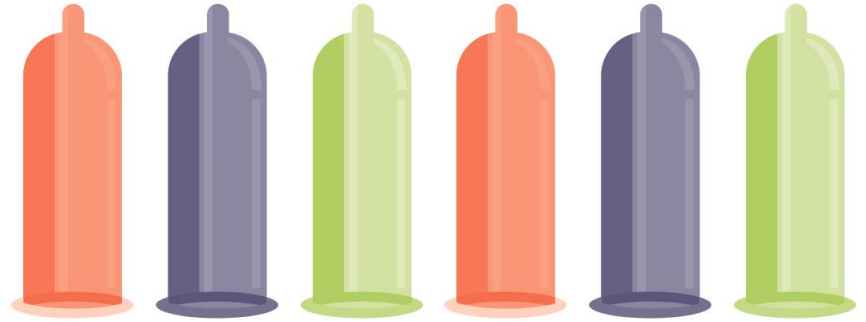
The phone, sexting and web chat platforms can be ways to connect socially and sexually without exchanging fluids.





### **Selective kissing**

Kissing can easily pass COVID-19. Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts.

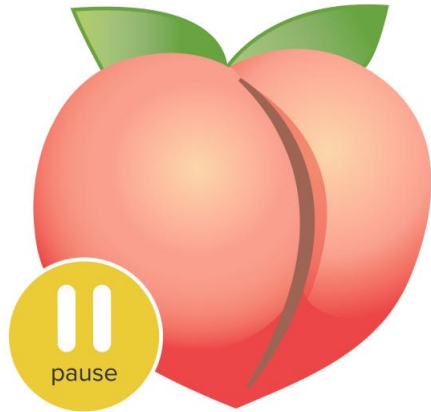


### **Use condoms**

Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact with saliva or feces, especially during oral or anal sex.

## Press pause

Rimming (mouth on anus) might spread COVID-19. Virus in feces may enter your mouth.



## Wash your hands

Washing up before and after sex is more important than ever. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.





## Table 1. Risk reduction strategies to prevent sexually associated communication of COVID-19 among men who have sex with men

- Limit number of sexual partners, preferably to those who are live in only
- Avoid use of mobile- or internet-based sexual networking applications (e.g., Grindr, Scruff, and Adam4Adam) to recruit sex partners
- If immunocompromised due to HIV infection or other etiology, avoid sexual activity
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after any sexual activity
- Avoid kissing
- Use a condom when performing fellatio
- Use a condom or barrier (e.g., dental dam) when performing anilingus (rimming)
- Use a condom during anal intercourse
- Do not insert penises or toys into the oral cavities of sexual partners after anal insertion

*Note: References: CDC, 2020a; Corrado, 2020; Feng et al., 2020; Kassel, 2020; NYC Health, 2020; Planned Parenthood, 2020.*

# Thanks!

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