



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sex in the time of COVID-19:

Preliminary results from a survey conducted on Jul 21-Aug 4, 2020


Implications for practice:

- The survey findings fill a gap in understanding how people's sexual behavior, sexual health and need for sexual health services evolved over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in BC. The findings are current as of early August 2020, and reflect people engaged in sexual health care who were likely more sexually active prior to the pandemic.
- These findings do not suggest changes in sexual behavior that would contribute greatly to increased spread of COVID-19 in BC, with almost all participants reporting using strategies to reduce their risk of COVID-19 infection during sexual encounters. However, many individuals who needed sexual health services did not have their need met. The findings support the importance of using sex-positive, harm reduction service educational messages related to sex and COVID-19, and developing alternative methods of sexual healthcare to facilitate access during the pandemic.

What is this study about?

We conducted this study to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's sex lives and access to sexual health services in BC. We also wanted to know whether alternate ways of delivering sexual health services during the COVID-19 pandemic would be acceptable. By doing this survey, we hoped to collect information that would help to inform future decisions about changes to sexual health services in BC.

What did we do?

We conducted an online survey of BC sexual health service clients between July 21 and August 4, 2020. Clients were recruited from the BC Centre for Disease Control's West 12th sexual health clinic and through  GetCheckedOnline.com, an internet-based testing service.

What did we find?

Changes in sexual behaviours and sexual health related to COVID-19

58% of participants
had no or one partner since the
start of the pandemic




64% of participants
had looked for or received information
of being exposed to COVID-19 infection
during sexual encounters.

35% of participants
would feel judged by others for
having sex during the pandemic.




- 80% of partners were regular sex partners, and 31% of partners lived in the same household.
- 40% reported no change in their number of sex partners during the pandemic and 31% reported a decrease. Of the 25% reporting an increased number of partners, most (20%) reported the increase in partner number later in the pandemic.
- Overall, 26% of participants agreed that they were, or would soon be, having sex with more people than earlier in the pandemic.
- In the first phase of the BC pandemic (March - mid-May 2020), 65% of participants reported worry about getting COVID-19 during sexual encounters. By the time of the survey, 26% reported feeling less worried.

What did we find? (cont'd)

Ability to access needed sexual health services

- 59% of participants reported needing a sexual health service since the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic, of which 48% accessed the service and 52% did not. In some cases, access differed by type of service needed.
- Despite service closures, a substantial number of participants accessed sexual health clinics to meet their service needs (20% for a testing need, 27% for another sexual health service need). Seeing a family doctor or a nurse practitioner was the next most common service access point.
- 66% reported avoiding or delaying seeking sexual health services during the pandemic. **The most common reason given was because of:**
 -  Public health messaging to avoid seeking non-urgent care (52%)
 -  Concern about getting COVID-19 while at a clinic or a lab (48%)
 -  Sexual health service closures (40%)

Informing future planning for sexual health services during the pandemic

- The most appealing new options for accessing sexual health services were:
 -  Self-collection kits for testing
 -  Receiving test kits or antibiotics at home in plain packaging
 -  Express testing
- Overall, 41% of participants preferred to test through GetCheckedOnline as a result of the pandemic.
- Participants reported other impacts of the pandemic that may affect sexual behavior, including worsening of mental health, difficulty meeting financial needs, and increases in alcohol and recreational drug use.

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