

Sex Work COVID-19:

Guidelines for Sex Workers, Clients, Third Parties, and Allies

From Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network and
Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project



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Please note, this document is intended as general information and does not replace advice from health care officials.

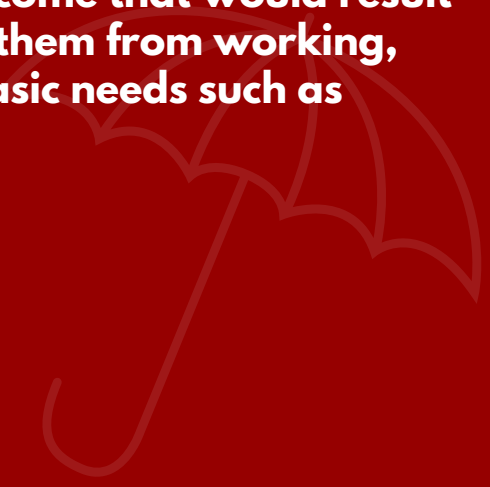
COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak has created a lot of stress and panic, but sex workers are and always have been resourceful and resilient.

We are experts in keeping ourselves and our communities safe. We've been doing it for decades! We would like to share our wisdom and learn from each other on how to overcome this current challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed many sex workers in a particularly difficult situation. Like other precarious workers, sex workers generally cannot access labour protections such as paid sick leave and unemployment insurance. Many of us are experiencing loss of income due to appointment cancellations, decreased demand for services, workplace closures, and sickness. Since sex industry jobs do not offer a salary, sick days, or benefits, there is little to no safety net for sex workers when we are unable to work.

While social distancing is strongly advised, it is particularly challenging for contact sex workers (full service workers, strippers, massage workers, professional dominants, etc), queer and trans sex workers, Black and Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) workers at the margins, and otherwise low-income workers to adhere to these recommendations. This is because the loss of income that would result from such social distancing measures prevents them from working, and makes the difference between affording basic needs such as food, medicine, childcare, rent, etc.



Sex Work

We recognize that many sex workers will need to go about their business as usual.

That is the reality of surviving in a capitalist society while enduring criminalization and stigmatization. In-person sex work should be a last resort at this time, and those who can refrain from in-person sex working should do so immediately.

We recommend alternative service arrangements such as Skype, phone or text sessions, if possible. But we also recognize that these options are not feasible for all sex workers, due to privacy and safety concerns, and inaccessibility to specific resources and technology.

This document follows a harm reduction approach, offering guidelines from various sources to help lower the risk of contact and transmission to those who must continue in-person sex working.

Knowing that each sex worker's work is unique, we encourage each of our community members to know how transmission occurs, how that fits with your individual work, and what decisions can be made for your specific situation to reduce as many risks as possible for yourself and others.

We have also included guidelines for clients, third parties, allies, and healthcare providers on how to best support sex workers during this time.

Supporters

If you are a supporter of sex workers and are currently not experiencing financial insecurity, or if you are sex worker experiencing an increase in business because of the COVID-19 outbreak, please consider making donations of money, time, or resources to individual sex workers and to community groups who work directly with these communities.



COVID-19 & Transmission

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. The disease was first identified in 2019 and has spread globally, resulting in the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic- a disease epidemic that has spread across a large region, multiple continents, or worldwide.

COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets produced when a sick person sneezes or coughs. The droplets can land on people and surfaces, and consequently threaten infection.

There is an asymptomatic period in which someone who has the virus can spread that virus to others without realizing that they are infected. The earlier the precautions are taken, the more precautions are taken, the more lives are saved.

Learn more about COVID-19:

- [Flatten The Curve \(Background\)](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)



Prevent the spread of COVID-19 in **7 STEPS**

- 01** Wash your hands frequently
- 02** Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- 03** Cover your cough using the bend of your elbow or a tissue
- 04** Avoid crowded places and close contact with anyone that has fever or cough
- 05** Stay at home if you feel unwell
- 06** If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early — but call first
- 07** Get information from trusted sources



SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

Protective Measures



Avoid touching your face.

- Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene.

- This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Wash your hands

Do this frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds because it's one of the best ways to kill germs on your hands and prevent the spread of germs to others.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

Practice social distancing.

- This includes: Staying home if you feel you may be sick. You can order food and supplies to have them dropped off in front of your door to avoid contact.



Protective Measures

Keep a distance of at least 3 feet (1m) from someone who is coughing or sneezing.

Maintain good mental health.

Keeping calm in whatever ways are personally effective (especially if you are living with children or anyone at high risk of contracting the virus).

Setting specific times, such as once in morning and once in evening, for keeping up with news and other pertinent information about the virus. This will help to avoid feeling overwhelmed with information while remaining informed.

Continue to access trusted information sources for up to date information and instructions.

Maintain good physical health.

Eat well, incorporating a wide variety of vegetables, lean proteins, complex carbohydrates, polyunsaturated fats, and probiotic foods such as unsweetened yogurt.

Continue to be physically active. This is a key element for physically and mentally coping with feelings of anxiety and panic, as well as boosting your immune system.

If you are at home, you can access all types of exercise regimens online, or video call to do some activities with friends and family.

COVID-19 Symptoms



Those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms. You may not know you have symptoms of COVID-19 because they are similar to a cold or flu and typically show up between 2 and 14 days after you've been exposed to the virus.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Fatigue

People who are considered high risk include those with underlying health conditions, including heart disease, lung disease such as asthma/COPD, diabetes, or HIV, or people who are immunocompromised, or over age 60.

If you are ill and must visit a health care professional, call ahead or tell them when you arrive that you have a respiratory illness. You may be asked to wear a mask while waiting for or receiving treatment to prevent the spread of the illness.

If you have travelled abroad and you develop fever, cough or difficulty breathing in the next 14 days: isolate yourself within the home as quickly as possible and call your health care provider.

- Source: [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



When To Get Tested For COVID-19

A stylized illustration of a city skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings in shades of grey and blue, positioned behind the main title.

Who Should Visit An Assessment Centre?

People with mild symptoms of upper respiratory tract infection: cough sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, runny nose, and joint aches

May also experience nausea, diarrhea and stomach pains) and any of the following:

Fever of 38°C or higher

Underlying health condition(s) of concern.

cardiovascular disease,

chronic lung disease,

cerebrovascular disease (e.g. previous stroke),

hypertension, diabetes, cancer, immunosuppression, c

urrent smoking

Age 60 years or older

Symptomatic patients should self-isolate while waiting to reach Telehealth Ontario or seeking medical attention.

Where To Get Tested For COVID-19



To rapidly expand screening and ease pressures on hospital emergency departments, a number of dedicated assessment centres have been established across Toronto.

Locate your nearest COVID-19 Assessment Centre here.

Unsure? Contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health Hotline

- 8:30 a.m. – 8 p.m.
- Telephone 416-338-7600
- TTY: 416-392-0658
- Email: PublicHealth@toronto.ca

311 Toronto

- Outside City limits: 416-392-2489
- Call if you have questions about City services.
- Telephone: 311
- TTY: 416-338-0889

Emergency Services

- Call if you're having difficulty breathing or experiencing other severe symptoms.

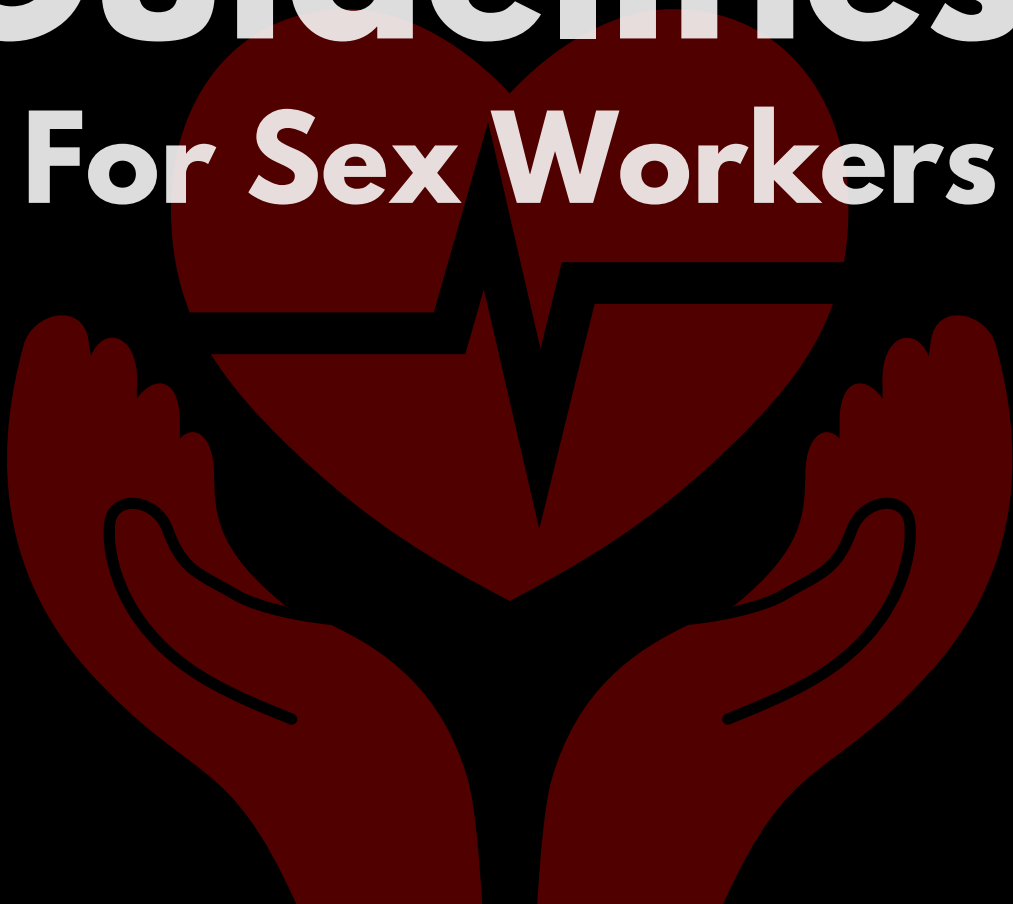
**OHIP coverage is
not required to be
seen at a COVID-19
Assessment Centre.**

**The assessment is
provided at no cost
to the individual.**



Protective Guidelines:

For Sex Workers



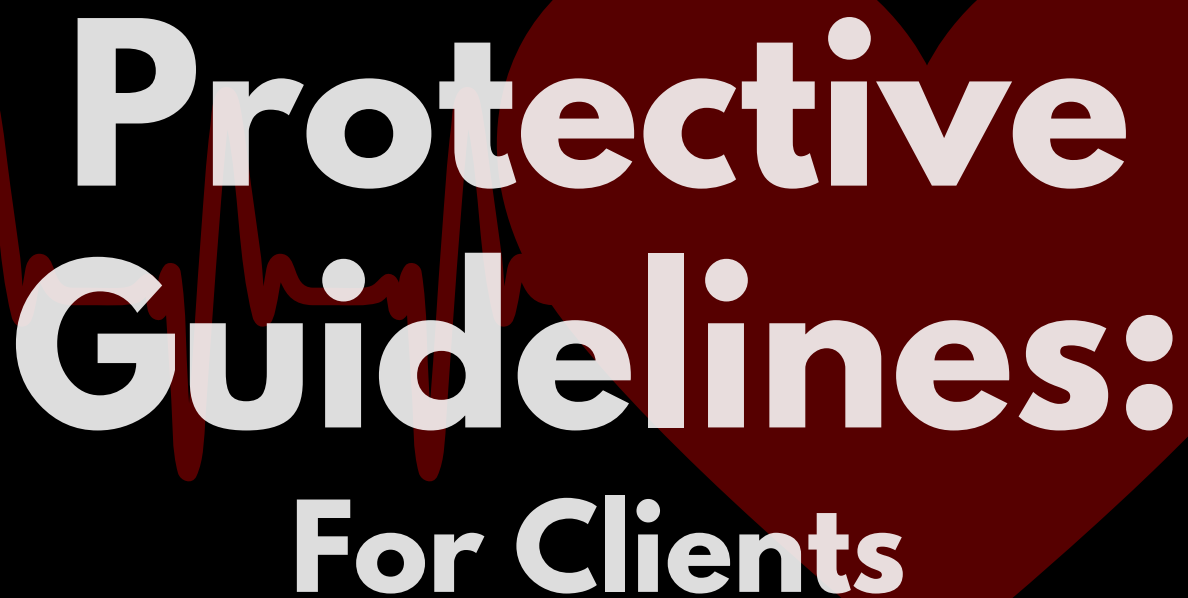
Sex Work COVID-19



- **If you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have travelled outside of the country, stay home and call your healthcare provider for medical advice.**
- **Refrain from hugging or kissing colleagues.**
 - **If possible, decline clients who: have cold symptoms or have been exposed to anyone with symptoms, have had exposure to anyone who has tested positive, are from outside of Canada, or who have recently travelled.**
- **Always wash your hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer: in between each client, whenever you come in from outside or change locations, and after handling money.**
- **Require clients to thoroughly wash their hands and face with soap before contact. If there is no regular access to facilities with soap and water, carry hand sanitizer and require clients to use it.**
- **Keep tissues on hand that can be provided if the client is sneezing or coughing. Avoid making contact with the tissues, and ensure they are disposed of promptly.**
 - **If you make contact with any tissues, wash your hands immediately.**

Sex Work COVID-19

- **Wherever possible, avoid kissing, saliva exchange, mouth contact on skin, as well as putting objects in your mouth (including your fingers) that have touched the client.**
 - **Instead of kissing and direct contact, consider offering alternative services such as erotic massage, and strip-tease, and opt for sexual positions that minimize face-to-face contact (e.g doggy style, cow girl/person).**
- **Avoid direct contact with bodily fluids.**
 - **Use condoms, dental dams, and gloves.**
- **After appointments, disinfect work surfaces and any materials that were used.**
- **If possible, do not share dishes or cutlery with others.**
 - **If this can't be avoided, wash thoroughly with soap and hot water using a paper towel that's disposed of afterwards.**
- **Consider minimizing all nonessential international travel.**
 - **If possible screen clients who have been travelling to affected areas.**



Protective Guidelines:


For Clients

Clients & COVID-19

- **Know that sex workers are already experts in keeping sanitary work spaces and practising safe contact, and have been keeping themselves safe for decades during flu seasons. Their livelihood depends on this.**
- **If you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have travelled outside of the country, do not meet with sex workers. Stay home and call your healthcare provider for medical advice.**
- **Send money to your service-provider instead of meeting in-person. You may wish to ask if alternative arrangements are possible such as Skype, phone, or text sessions. However, be understanding that this may not be feasible for a variety of reasons.**
- **If experiencing no symptoms, and meeting with sex workers, respect and adhere to their boundaries as usual, which in this case may include additional precautions around cleanliness and physical contact.**
- **Do not be predatory.**
 - **Do not offer more money, or make repeated requests to coerce a sex worker into providing risky services. If a sex worker says “no french kissing” then that’s final (as should always be the case!)**

Clients & COVID-19

- **Practice good hygiene.**
 - **Take the initiative in washing your hands and face thoroughly upon meeting with your service provider. If facilities allow, take a shower.**
- **Be open about your concerns and boundaries.**
- **Take responsibility for the safety of the situation and practice good respiratory hygiene throughout the meeting.**
 - **If you cough or sneeze, do so away from your service provider's body, and cover your mouth or nose with your elbow or a tissue.**
- **Tip generously.**
 - **Sex workers are experiencing major declines in business and you may be their only customer for the foreseeable future.**
- **Be aware of your racism and stop discriminating against Asian workers. Media outlets around the world have reported stories of hostility and discrimination towards members of Asian communities.**
- **Refrain from making comments and "jokes" that support discrimination. Instead, book Asian workers, be respectful, and tip generously!**



Protective Guidelines: For Third Parties

Third Parties COVID-19

- **Consider posting a sign outside the establishment (e.g., strip club, massage parlour) indicating that in order to protect the health of workers and the community, clients who are showing signs of COVID-19 cannot enter the premises.**
- **Consider including symptoms and questions about travel in the client screening process.**
- **Do not push people to work who have called in sick.**
- **Waive shift cancellation fees.**
 - **Ensure workers don't feel pressured to work despite having symptoms or feeling unsafe to do so.**
- **Ensure work spaces are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.**
 - **This should be standard practice, but prudence should be taken in ensuring all surfaces workers and clients come into contact with have been sanitized.**



Protective Guidelines: For Allies



Allies & COVID-19



**Do not shame sex workers for continuing their work as usual.
For many this is a matter of survival.**

Check-in on the sex workers in your life.

- **This is an incredibly stressful time for workers, and having someone to talk with can mean a lot.**

If possible, offer resources to the sex workers in your life

- **e.g. safer sex supplies, sanitation supplies, food, money.**
- **Donate to individual sex workers in your life.**

Consider donating money to organizations that provide frontline support to sex workers.

Due to stigma, sex workers face a lot of barriers in seeking health services.

- **If a sex worker in your life is experiencing symptoms, ask how you can support them.**
- **This may involve being on the phone with them as they call their doctor or local health clinic.**



Additional Community Resources

Resources

Alternative Income (camming and content creation):

- Digital Sex Work Platform Information
- COYOTE Sex Worker Harm Reduction Resources

▪ Sex Worker Harm Reduction Hotline:

- Stella, Montreal (514-285-8889)
- Butterfly (Asian & Migrant Sex Workers Support Network) Hotline (416-906-3098)

▪ General Hotlines:

- Crisis Services Canada Suicide Helpline (1-833-456-4566)
- Toronto Distress Centre (416-408-HELP (4357))

▪ Financial Support:

- Ontario Works
- Applying for Employment Insurance
- Ontario Disability Support
- Glad Day Emergency Survival Fund
- Black Creek Community Farm Fund
- Emergency Fund for Toronto's Precarious Workers
- Canadian Low-Income Artist/Musician Relief Fund
- Black Emergency Support Fund from BLMTO
- Donate
- Apply
- NABS financial assistance for media, marketing, and communications pros
- The AFC — Emergency financial aid for entertainment pros
- North American Mutual Aid Fund for LGBTQI+ BIPOC Folks

An illustration of two women from the waist up, set against a solid red background. The woman on the left has long, dark hair and is wearing a light pink long-sleeved top. The woman on the right has short, curly dark hair and is wearing a dark purple long-sleeved top. Both women have their right fists raised in a gesture of solidarity or protest. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

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