

Love goes on in lockdown, but is less physical for some

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Sexual activity and dating app use declined among Australian adults during the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown, although chatting on dating apps increased, University of Melbourne research has found.

Published in BMJ journal *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, the national online survey looked at the impact of lockdown restrictions on [sexual](#)

[practices](#) before and during the lockdown. It ran from April-May with 965 respondents mostly aged under 30 and recruited via social media.

"Love During Lockdown" found clear changes in sexual activity and practices during the peak of the COVID-19 restrictions. Most respondents (53.5 percent) reported less sex during this time than in 2019.

The changes were starkest among those who were single, with 69.1 percent reporting less sex during lockdown compared with 2019. Of those reporting sexual activity during lockdown, sexual partners were most often their regular partners.

Compared with 2019, participants were more likely to report sex with a spouse (35.3 percent in 2019 vs 41.7 in 2020) and less likely to report sex with a girl/boyfriend (45.1 vs 41.8 percent) or with a casual hook-up (31.4 vs 7.8 percent).

While some participants washed their hands more frequently before and after sex, there was little hygiene change in partnered sex practices. Overall, 9.1 percent reported testing for COVID-19, but none were positive.

Solo sex activities increased, particularly among those reporting less or no sex during lockdown; 14.6 percent reported using sex toys more often and 26 percent reported masturbating more often.

Dating app use decreased compared with 2019 (42.1 vs 27.3 percent). However, using them for chatting/texting (89.8 vs 94.5 percent) and for setting up virtual dates (2.6 vs 17.2 percent) increased.

"Contrary to our initial assumptions that dating app use would increase during lockdown and reports of increasing use of [dating apps](#) during

periods of lockdown worldwide, overall our findings showed a marked decrease in use," study author Dr. Jacqueline Coombe from the University of Melbourne said.

"In particular, we saw significant declines in use among people who identified as female, those aged 18–29 years and those in a relationship. Among singles, dating app use declined by only a small amount, with over 60 percent of them using apps during lockdown. Dating apps are often used to facilitate in-person sexual and romantic connections; for the participants in our study, the physical distancing enforced during lockdown perhaps drove usual users off the platform."

Among those still using apps, more used them for chatting/texting and organizing virtual dates. Some continued to use them for in-person dates/hook-ups.

"Interestingly, rates of sexting or swapping intimate pictures did not significantly change between 2019 and lockdown," co-author and University of Melbourne Professor Jane Hocking said. "Furthermore, only a small proportion of participants reported being diagnosed with STIs during lockdown and few reported accessing STI testing."

The researchers were unclear about whether these changes would continue. "As the pandemic continues, it is important to continue to monitor changes in sexual activity and associated implications for sexual and reproductive health," Professor Hocking said.

"In the short term, as restrictions lift and people increasingly engage in casual sex, sexual health organizations, including ASHM, have produced guidelines for reducing risk of COVID-19 transmission during these encounters and are encouraging regular HIV and STI screening."

Although significant declines in [sexual activity](#) during [lockdown](#) were

reported, people did not completely stop engaging in sexual activities, highlighting the importance of ensuring availability of normal sexual and [reproductive health](#) services during global emergencies.

More information: Jacqueline Coombe. *Sexually Transmitted Infections* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/sextrans-2020-054688](https://doi.org/10.1136/sextrans-2020-054688)

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