

# Sex, Safety, and A(nother) Pandemic: Effective Messaging for Sexual Health During COVID-19



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# Background

**Author background:** Adam Awad completed his B.A., Hons at the University of Toronto and has over a decade of experience in communications work—spanning political and campaigns organizing, health, and advertising. Prior to the GMSH, Adam worked as a senior strategist for a communications agency and as a digital communications specialist at various levels in politics. He has also served on the Boards of Directors for the Centretown Community Health Centre and the Alliance for Healthier Communities.

**Project background:** The GMSH creates popular education materials on sex and sexual health for 2Spirit, gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men (2SGBTQMSM). Given the unfolding pandemic, we noticed that there was little-to-no guidance on sexual health coming from public health authorities. Gay men are no strangers to finding ways of translating technical information into something that is useful for our sexual lives, and so the GMSH produced a suite of resources for gay, bisexual, and queer men, including those who engage in Party & Play/chemsex. The challenge was to adapt existing messaging into formats, framing, and platforms that would reach the community.

The resources covered a broad range of topics, including loneliness and community care, tips for sexual satisfaction in isolation, guidance for people living with HIV on accessing medications, and what was known about COVID transmission and medication interactions (including HIV medications like PrEP).

Over the past two years, this messaging was updated periodically as the information from public health agencies changed and as more was learned about COVID-19. The final (for now) updates were made once vaccines were widely available for people in Ontario.

# The Resources

[A direct-to-camera video with drag queen Brooke Lynn Heights with a message of encouragement for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community](#)



[A curated discussion between film and TV producer Michael Yerxa and Toronto drag queen Tynomi Banks on sexual choices in the early days of the pandemic](#)



A detailed web resource:  
[TheSexYouWant.ca/COVID-19](https://TheSexYouWant.ca/COVID-19)



Infographics on COVID, sex, & HIV



[A community-based virtual discussion on Party & Play: Sex, Drugs, and COVID-19](#)



[Three series of PSA videos with the queer burlesque troupe BoylesqueTO](#)



You don't have to go out to get off.  
Help stop the spread of COVID-19.

More info at [thesexyouwant.ca/COVID19](https://thesexyouwant.ca/COVID19)

# Results & Discussion

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- The resources were released online on social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), on YouTube, on pornography sites like PornHub, and on TheSexYouWant.ca/COVID-19. The videos were released as both organic (non-paid) and ad (paid) content.
- Overall, the resources reached over 300,000 people in Ontario.
- The resources remain among the only science-based guidance for sex and sexual health related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.
- The decision to translate public health guidance to relate specifically to sex and sexual health led to challenges with mainstream platforms like Facebook and Google, where only the most limited sexual health information (i.e. condoms and birth control) are permitted. As a result, we turned directly to pornography sites, which turned out to be the most effective platform to reach our target audience. It is possible that this success resulted from serving the video content in an explicitly sexual space, when the audience already has sex on their mind. In addition, the videos were sufficiently different from the typical ads served on these sites that they would have drawn attention.
- All of the resources aimed to acknowledge the realities that 2SGBTQMSM faced throughout the pandemic while balancing the most accurate scientific information and public health guidance alongside sex positivity and an explicitly queer tone.

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