

Consent & COVID-19: Exploring the Unexpected Intersections of Sexual Health and the Coronavirus

A recap of our group discussion and presentation

When did you first learn about setting and respecting boundaries?

As a child when playing with other kids, I was taught that when someone says "Stop" you have to stop.

When I was young I learned that I can say "No" to doctors when I don't want to do something, and if I wasn't comfortable saying "No" I could tell my parent and they would help me set that boundary.

As a cis-gendered male, I wasn't taught to think much about boundary setting until I got to high school, but I came to realize how important it is.

There were some mixed messages around boundaries when it came to play as a child - for example, saying stop when being tickled is often taken lightheartedly and not as a legitimate cue to stop.

How have you handled setting boundaries during the pandemic?

Having boundaries around things like mask wearing and social distancing reflects both how I value myself AND how I value others.

I felt like I had to disclose my chronic illness for others to understand why I couldn't hang out. It felt vulnerable and out of my comfort zone but I've become a better advocate for myself.

For the most part, family and friends have been respectful of each other's boundaries because they understand the severity of the consequences if they break those boundaries.

What are some parallels between day-to-day boundary setting around COVID-19 and sexual consent?

Checking in with each other's comfort levels with different kinds of activities.

Being aware of your own boundaries and knowing how to communicate them.

Letting your sexual partner(s) know if you've tested positive for COVID-19, as you would if you tested positive for a STI.

Your personal values and history underlie your decisions and comfort levels.

Communicating what safety precautions you've taken with other people and if they've been safe around others too.

I'm worried I've been exposed to COVID-19 because of SGBM...now what?

Any student who is worried they've been exposed - because of SGBM or not - should report to Health Services (Note: They're confidential! If you choose to disclose SGBM to them, they will not be required to report SGBM to the Title IX Coordinator).

Health Services will consider potential "meaningful exposure," timing, presence of symptoms, etc., and make any health & safety recommendations and arrangements as appropriate.

Here are a few important things to know about SGBM investigations during the pandemic:

- Similar to the Amnesty Policy for AOD, complainants and witnesses who are involved in SGBM investigations will not receive Conduct charges should they provide information that indicates they were violating the COVID-19 Conduct Policy.
- Students' medical status - including COVID-19 testing status - will not be shared with investigators.
- Not informing a sexual partner that you are positive for COVID-19 would be considered when exploring whether consent was present or not.