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What Alcohol, Sex, Facebook and Pregnancy Teach Us about COVID-19 Safety

Although vaccinations are on the way, we are still at least three to six months away from mass distribution. Until that happens and we are actually able to breathe a sigh of relief, we can all play our part in reducing the number of coronavirus cases and alleviating our overwhelmed healthcare system. Of course, there is still a lot to learn about the causes and effects of the coronavirus, but there are some simple, and very important, life lessons we've already learned that can help us better understand – and prevent the spread of – the disease.

1. The more you drink, the drunker you become. Both alcohol and COVID-19 have a dose-response, or exposure-response, relationship in terms of quantity and outcome. We know that the more alcohol we consume, the longer we drink in one sitting and the higher the alcohol content is in what we choose to drink, the more our consumption will affect our behavior. Coronavirus in respiratory droplets act much the same way. The higher the number of virus particles you receive, through direct or indirect contact, the more likely you are to become infected and the more severe the symptoms will likely become. This means the longer you stay in a place that has droplets in the air, the proximity you are to the droplets and the concentration of the droplets you receive all play a role in your likelihood to contract COVID-19. In that respect, you can think of someone without a mask exhaling directly into your face as being relative to drinking a shot of whiskey. Your body will likely be affected. Stand there long enough – while drinking more and more shots – and it's much less likely you will be able to control what happens next. Similarly, you can think of a quick trip to the grocery store with your mask on – an environment that may have coronavirus droplets lingering in the air – as having just a few sips of wine. It's in your system, but unlikely to make much of an impact.
2. You usually know when you've had sex. Sexual intercourse has its fair share of communicable diseases. Typically, you know when you've "done the deed" and can often trace back to who and when you were exposed to a sexually transmitted infection, or at least narrow it down. In fact, for

more than a century, contact tracing has been used in public health practices to control the spread of Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Herpes, HIV and other communicable conditions. Unfortunately, with COVID-19, we don't always know when we've been exposed to the virus or who may have exposed us to it. Since moisture molecules linger in the air, we often have no way of knowing whose virus-filled vapor we've walked into. That's why it's crucial to limit the number of people you come in contact with – for both their sake and yours. If you contract the coronavirus after sharing the air with only three or four people, you can better determine from whom you contracted it and know exactly who you exposed to the disease. During the current state of this pandemic, we definitely want to limit the number of people with whom we share our air. Let's take what we know about practicing Safe Sex and begin practicing Safe Breathing.

3. We know how posts go viral on Facebook. Every day, we see a meme or video that ends up everywhere. Remember Chewbacca Mask Lady laughing hysterically in the parking lot of Kohl's? Within three days, Texas mom, Candace Payne's, Facebook Live video racked up more than 164 million views and she has since made several national television appearances, received full college scholarships for her family, signed endorsement deals with global brands and become an inspirational speaker on, "Enjoying the Simple Joys in Life." She made that video for her 100 Facebook friends to see. And then, they shared it with their Facebook Friends, who shared it with theirs. That's what happens with the coronavirus. You know who you're connected to, but you don't know everyone in their friend networks. You can invite one friend to your home for dinner, not knowing they recently had dinner with a friend who had dinner with a friend that exposed them to COVID-19. We may know where our friends have been, but not where the vast web of contacts who they've been exposed to have been. When it comes to opening up our in-person circle, we need to remember how one woman's desire to share a funny moment on Facebook turned her into a worldwide sensation.
4. Pregnancy tests don't show positives, right away. If you or anyone you know has taken a pregnancy test, you might know that you should wait until the week after the first missed period for the most accurate result and no less than two weeks after intercourse. That's because there are no immediately detectable levels of human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG), the hormone that supports normal development of an egg, for at least two weeks. Likewise, the incubation period for the novel coronavirus is now known to be somewhere between 2 to 14 days after exposure. So, you can be exposed to the virus and not be detectable for a week, or two. That means there is a week, or two, when you can consistently test negatively for COVID-19...while it's multiplying and growing in your body. (And, unlike pregnancy, there often aren't symptoms, like morning sickness, that can be used as indicators). This is precisely why CDC guidelines instruct everyone to isolate for 14 days after known exposure to the virus. At the end of that time is when you can begin to trust the results of a viral test. Basically, if we remember it's necessary to wait two weeks after intercourse to test whether someone's pregnant, we should also remember that same rule when testing for COVID-19.