

What does dating look like now?

Three women share their experiences of looking for love during a pandemic

Dating can be awkward at the best of times. Add in masks, social distancing and ever-changing rules about bubbles and it starts to become slightly surreal.

Yet despite everything, romance appears to be thriving. The pandemic has seen a massive 82% global spike in online dating*, and dating apps report that video chats between users are booming. There's also been a rise in the "turbo relationship", with new couples fast-tracking moving in together to avoid being separated. Dating during the pandemic even has its own language – there's "coronalingus", a more extreme version of sexting, and "coronazoned", a lockdown twist on friend-zoning.

So what does searching for love in the age of COVID-19 actually look like, and how do you even dress for video dates – disco on top, PJs on the bottom? We spoke to three single women about the realities of socially distanced hook-ups, and styled them in our favourite date looks from Very. Let's go pandating.

Overshirt, £170; jeans, £95, both Whistles at Very. Shirt, £28, River Island at Very. Trainers, £90, Nike at Very



Words
ALISON LYNCH
Photographs
ROSALINE
SHAHNAVAZ

"Within a week, I was on Hinge talking to three different people"

Paisley Gilmour, 31, Cosmo's sex and relationships editor

"The pandemic has been making me panic a bit about missing out on new experiences, so I've been throwing myself into dating," admits Paisley. "Within a week, I was on Hinge talking to three different people. I would never usually spend so much time messaging, but it was all you could do."

"I ended up chatting to one person for a few weeks, and we eventually decided to meet up. I cycled nine miles to see them,

which I think showed commitment. We were looking for somewhere to go and ended up walking around a cemetery! We did have an upgrade for our second date, though – we went to the park.

"I don't tend to dress up too much for dates. It just has to be comfortable and warm, especially as you don't know where you might end up – cemeteries included. As for relationships, I'm definitely keeping my options open."

Cosmopolitan promotion for Very

"After years of being single, I think I may have actually found a boyfriend during lockdown"

Isabella Silvers, 28, an associate editor from Birmingham

"At the start of lockdown, I kind of gave up on dating because I didn't want to talk to someone for three months before getting to meet them," explains Isabella. "But then I got curious about video dating, so I thought I'd give it a go. It's definitely harder to keep the conversation flowing when you're not going anywhere. I've also moved in with my grandparents, so it was quite strange being on dates while they were downstairs. I was worried they would just pop in."

"I ended up meeting someone on Bumble and we've been seeing each other for a few months now. We live quite close

to each other, so we've been able to go for long walks and meet in the park. I've swapped waist-up styling for comfy dresses with trainers – it's making an effort but not trying too hard.

"After years of being single, I think I may have actually found a boyfriend during lockdown. We kissed on the third date, so we're not socially distanced any more, but intimacy is tough as I'm with my grandparents and he's living with his parents. We're just trying to work that out."



Dress, £25, V by Very. Trainers, £65, Converse at Very

Kenke Danmole, 29, a project manager from Milton Keynes

"I've been single for about four years, so 2020 was meant to be my year," laughs Kenke. "I don't really like using dating apps and prefer to meet people through friends of friends, so I'm just starting conversations on social media and seeing where it goes. People seem much more open to chatting. If it's going well, we'll FaceTime."

"I've been on one date so far, but I don't know whether to see him again. One thing this year has taught me is to make the most of the time I have; if I'm not sure, I just need to move on."

"The pandemic has removed a lot of distractions – a guy can't necessarily just impress you by taking you to a fancy restaurant any more, so they need to have good conversation. If you don't have a meaningful connection, it just won't work."

"I want to make meaningful connections"



Dress, £50, Chi Chi London x Helen Flanagan at Very. Top, £12, V by Very. Boots, £159, Kurt Geiger London at Very

*STATISTIC FROM DATING.COM. STYLING MADELEINE BOWDEN. HAIR ELVIRE ROUX. MAKE-UP JOE PICKERING. ART DIRECTION LEO GODDARD