

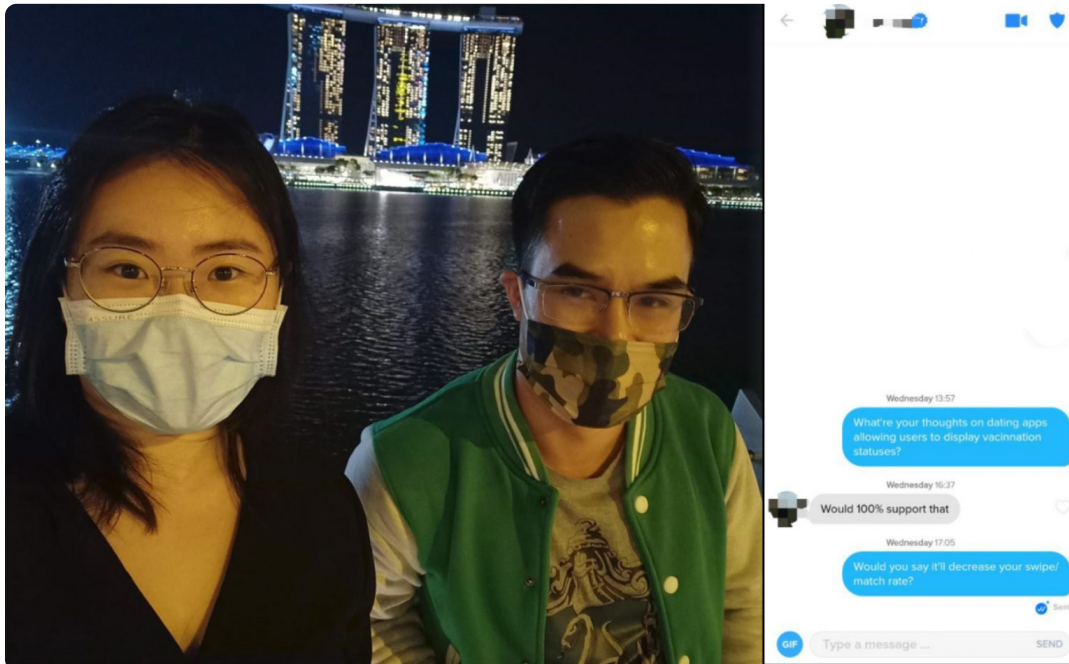
Virtual blind dates to video meets, how Covid-19 has changed the way S'poreans fall in love (https://vulcanpost.com/757770/online-dating-industry-changes-singapore/)



Angela Teng(https://vulcanpost.com/author/angela/)



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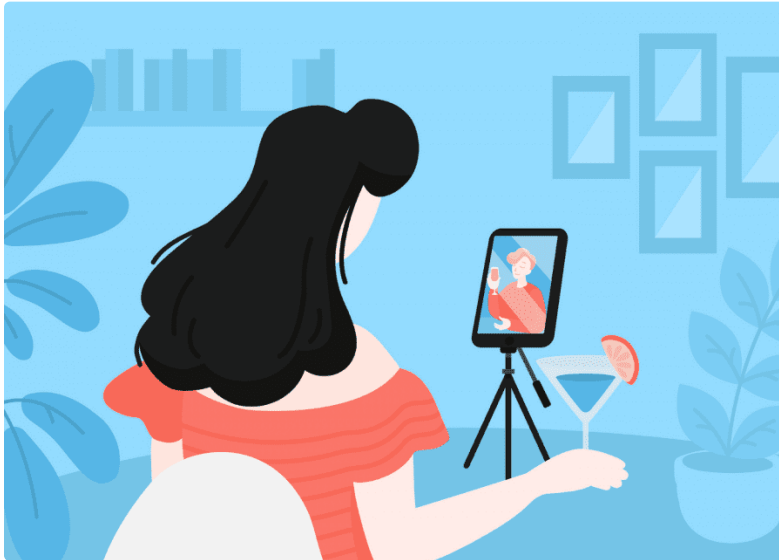
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Stuck at home and told to avoid crowds, the pandemic has caused many singles to feel isolated and alone. To quell that lonely feeling, many have turned to dating apps during this period. These days, more are dating with intention too.

Dating app user Felicia (not her real name) who is in her mid 30s, said she met a Korean National who is based in Korea online. Both of them have been in a committed online relationship for almost two years amid the border lockdown in both countries.

“It’s quite romantic, like a Korean drama show. We call and chat about our day, what we ate, and share our hopes and dreams. He says he wants to come to Singapore to find me once the borders reopen. What started off as companionship has become something serious, we will :
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When Vulcan Post reached out to dating apps and agencies to check about the dating scene today, they told us that more users are looking for serious daters only.



(<https://cdn01.vulcanpost.com/wp-uploads/2021/08/dating-pandemic-singapore-6-900x643-1.png>)

Felicia has been virtually dating her serious partner for two years / Image Credit: The Honeycombers

The pandemic has changed what many daters are looking for, as people are now more reflective about what they want, dating agency Paktor Group said.

With the experience from the pandemic, I don't think I can take constant flings or breakups that easily. I think self-love has become an important part of who I am and what I need.

Julie, marketing professional in her 20s

A survey from popular dating app Coffee Meets Bagel (CMB) revealed that 57 per cent of Singaporean daters are taking longer to decide to meet someone. More than half surveyed said the pandemic has made people reflect more on what they're looking for in a partner, CMB co-founder and Chief Dating Officer Dawoon Kang told Vulcan Post.

Almost half (47 per cent) of the CMB users said that Covid-19 has changed what singles are looking for on dating apps, with a large portion now looking for something more long-term. Meanwhile, only a small group (9 per cent) are looking for something more casual, Dawoon shared.



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A separate survey (Annual Singles Dating Survey 2020) from dating agency Lunch Actually also showed that the pandemic has increased singles' desire to search for "The One" because it made them realise the importance of having a partner in life.

But as with all disruptions caused by the pandemic, the dating industry has not been spared either. Forget about face-to-face meetups singles, your first date might involve you dressing up and then turning on the computer.

"There's an emerging trend of video dating and virtual speed dating events that could help singles to stay in the dating game even without meeting their date face-to-face," said Violet Lim, CEO and co-founder at Lunch Actually.

Video dating is set to be a new normal amid the pandemic and for the future too as people get used to the idea, said Violet. She added that 68 per cent of singles in Lunch Actually's latest dating survey are not ruling out video dating.



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More singles are looking for love and want to find a life partner. Covid-19 has also led to a rise in virtual dating.

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More seeking love

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been more people looking for love as Covid-19 safety measures have made singles long for social interaction, said Paktor Group.

“We have seen more enquiries over the past 18 months,” Paktor Group said. It owns dating app Paktor and offline dating agency GaiGai.

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Dawoon.

Created in 2012, the San Francisco-based CMB app has seen more than 13 million matches since it arrived on our shores in 2015.



(<https://cdn01.vulcanpost.com/wp-uploads/2021/08/Video-dates.jpg>)

More people are looking for love, and resort to virtual meetings / Image Credit: Lunch Actually

However, another question pops up on our minds: How can these singles meet and date people consistently amid Covid-19?

Dating in the pandemic is difficult due to social restrictions like safe distancing and requirements like wearing masks most of the time when out. To add to these, many places and events where singles used to meet new people – like clubs and gatherings – are now either closed or downsized.

Even dating agencies like Lunch Actually can no longer arrange physical dating events. To adapt to Covid-19, the team had pivoted to serve singles virtually through online consultations, coaching, virtual dates, and virtual speed dating events.

“We resorted to launching our series of weekly webinars where we brought in different speakers to share about various self-improvements and dating topics...to date, we have engaged hundreds of participants online,” shared Violet.

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The rise of virtual dating

Another obstacle for singles is the constant changing of restriction phases from the government over the last 18 months. But even with such uncertainties, singles are still open to dating, said Paktor Group, as dating enquiries have risen 10 per cent higher than during the pre-Covid period.

“In general over the past one-and-a-half years, the match rate has increased as more people are searching for love online on our app. Engagement and retention rates are also higher per active user.”

Many singles are spending more time seeking companionship as they now face more issues like work stress, boredom, and mundane routines, noted Lunch Actually’s Violet.

That’s why virtual blind dates and online workshops are getting more popular to help singles find love online, Paktor Group and Lunch Actually said. “We do expect such a trend to continue to grow as it provides a safer option for both parties to know each other,” Paktor Group said.



(<https://cdn01.vulcanpost.com/wp-uploads/2021/08/dating-2.jpg>)

Dating apps are giving users virtual dating ideas as it provides as a safe option for individuals to know one another / Image Credit: GaiGai, Coffee Meets Bagel

Virtual dating also extends beyond the first date as existing relationships also rely on it to keep the spark going.

Ashley, who works in the communications industry and is in her early 30s, said her boyfriend turned husband and she relied on video calls during the Circuit Breaker.

“We did video calls when the pandemic was severe for the safety of our elderly parents. There was no vaccine then, so we had to be apart as we were not from the same household and could not meet. I think the virtual interactions really helped us keep the relationship alive, and also made me really treasure the connection that we have,” she said. Ashley married her husband later in the year.

For people who are not receptive to video dating, the advice dating experts have is: To not give up!

“Ultimately, we coach our clients that this pandemic is out of our control – and while we’re at it, why not do things that we can control...Don’t put your life on hold. For singles, take this opportunity to meet more people virtually and use this as a “filter” to see if your date is someone you would (or would not) want to meet in real life,” Violet said.



(<https://cdn01.vulcanpost.com/wp-uploads/2021/08/Virtual-Date-1.jpg>)

Online dates can help singles "filter" out dates they do not want to meet in real life / Image Credit: Lunch Actually

For those who are deeply in love and want to meet physically, they will require the right pandemic conditions as well as vaccination statuses.

The Singapore government recently relaxed measures for social gatherings (<https://www.gov.sg/article/updates-to-singapores-covid-19-measures-from-19-august-2021>) for fully vaccinated individuals in a move to open the economy later this year. This means that two fully vaccinated individuals on a date can do activities like dining in at restaurants by showing their vaccination statuses.

According to dating experts, people have become pandemic-conscious. They add that a fully vaccinated individual actually has higher chances of getting matches.

Dating apps Bumble and CMB have added the vaccination badge function to users' dating accounts to allow singles to indicate their vaccination status on profiles. Paktor said it's also working on adding a vaccination feature into the app, its offline counterpart GaiGai is also offering priority dates for those who are vaccinated.

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Vaccinated or not

People have become more aware of their health and due to the pandemic, and it influences their choices in finding a partner.

Lunch Actually's Dating & Vaccination Survey 2021 recently polled 650 singles in Singapore f

It revealed that one out of three singles in the survey agreed that it is very important that their potential dates have been vaccinated, while almost 70 per cent say they feel safer to go on a date for the same reasons.



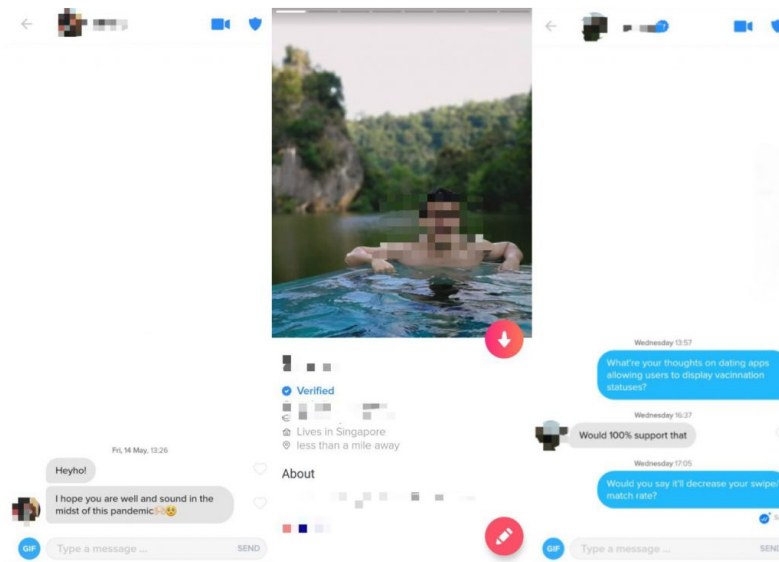
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92 per cent of Singapore daters think it's at least somewhat important that their match takes COVID-19 seriously / Image Credit: The Honeycombers

Trevor, who is in his 20s and works in e-commerce, said that he doesn't mind going out with a date if she is not vaccinated, but draws the line if the reason is self-indulgent.

"If she has health reasons, that's okay we can eat at the hawker centre or go outdoors for dates. But if she refuses to be vaccinated because she chooses not to for political or liberal reasons then it's goodbye. I won't even want to continue seeing this person as she might not be in the right mind."

Trevor's strong opinion on Covid-19 precautions are in fact normal, reasoned CMB's co-founder Dawoon.



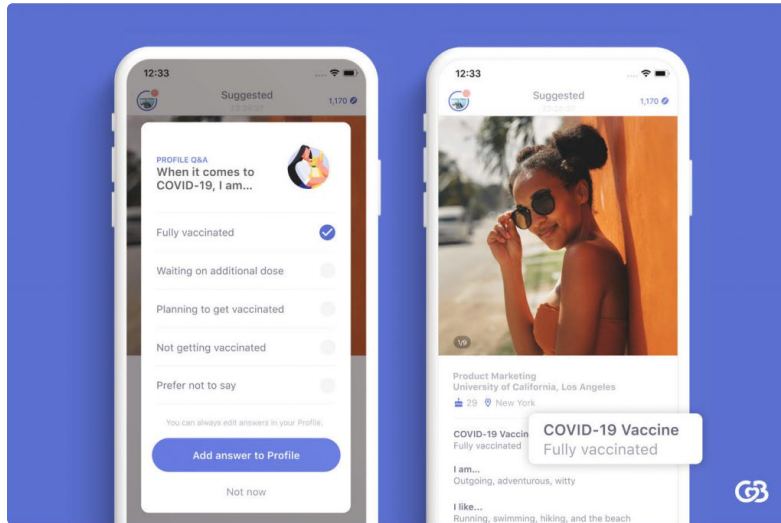
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Vaccination has become conversation starters / Image Credit: Tinder

Dawoon cited its recent CMB survey which revealed that 92 per cent of Singapore daters think it's at least somewhat important that their match takes COVID-19 seriously.

Three out of four respondents had said that it would be a dealbreaker if their match does not seem to take COVID-19 precautions seriously and 69 per cent said it would be a dealbreaker if their match does not wear a mask. About half (54 per cent) said it would be the end if their match does not adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Since October last year, dating account bios mentioning the word “vaccine” (or a variation of the word) have risen by 220 per cent, said Dawoon.



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Singles are adding their vaccination status in their bios / Image Credit: Coffee Meets Bagel

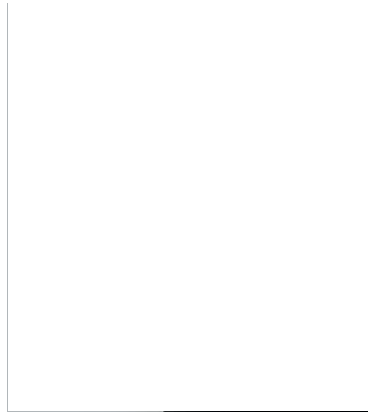
To help daters make safer decisions during the pandemic, CMB introduced a Vaccine Status feature in early March, becoming the first dating app to do so. Other apps like Bumble have joined in to roll out an “I’m Vaccinated” badge for people to share their vaccination status with their matches in the app.

As of July 29th, Dawoon said that 34.4 per cent of CMB Singaporean daters have added the “Vaccine Status” to their profiles to indicate that they are either fully vaccinated, waiting on an additional dose, or planning to get vaccinated.

The vaccination conversation will not stop at dating profiles, but will likely lurk into your first date conversations too, the dating experts said.

“This is going to be a common discussion among singles on a first date to talk about vaccinations and their stance on it. Some singles may not want to write their potential matches off immediately, as there may be valid reasons why someone may not be able to get vaccinated such as allergies,” said Violet.

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Future of dating

Due to Covid-19, the usage of voice and video calls for dating will continue to increase. To understand the dating patterns of singles in a pandemic world, we checked with the experts on that, as well as the future of dating.

CMB said it asked 1,656 Singaporean daters last year to pick their top date ideas and the results were:

1. Dinner (79%)
2. Coffee (71%)
3. Nature Walk (62%)
4. Game Night (28%)
5. Biking (16%)
6. Picnic (13%)
7. Phone Call (11%)

Other fun and safe date virtual ideas from singles include an online cook-off where the couple can cook the same meal or try a new recipe together, watch a movie together with share screen features, and go for virtual museum tours, said Lunch Actually's Violet.



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“They can also dress up according to different themes, or maybe even send each other a care package and then opening them together on camera.”

“For active singles, they can explore a new hiking trail or invite their date to their favorite hiking place and bond with each other over this experience,” she said.

And if Covid-19 restrictions heightens again, the advisors had this to say to singles:

“For GaiGai, we still see clients choosing to meet physically at parks or open areas during heightened restriction periods, with some trying out blind virtual dating where two singles meet on Zoom with a facilitator for the first time.”

If dining in is permitted, good date places can also include restaurants or cafes with semi-outdoor concepts.

The dating firms also noted that there have been more women who are in their 30s and single. Meanwhile, older singles who are above 50 are also returning to the dating scene.

“GaiGai sees a wide range of clients ranging from age 21 to even 60. While the majority of them fall in their 30s, we have seen the average age of females on our database increase from 29 to 31 in the past 3 years,” said Paktor Group.

Lunch Actually added: “Age group for female singles is mid 20s to late 40s while for male, it’s late 20s to 60s. And yes, we are seeing younger singles (early to mid 20s) and older singles (above 50) joining us in recent years.”

Because of the varying ages of singles, Lunch Actually launched its dating app last year to cater to the different needs. The app has manual verifications, to ensure that the clients are real and genuine.



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Image Credit: Living in Singapore

The dating firms are certain that despite the increase in virtual dating, offline dating is still here to stay.

“As an operator of both online and offline dating businesses, we note that online dating apps attract younger singles (average 18-30 years old) while offline dating attracts slightly more

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“At the end of the day, people still need physical interaction and companionship and all serious online relationships will likely end up in offline meetups, hence offline dating companies offer the solution to allow first dates to happen offline directly. That said, these dating companies must continue to become more efficient in matching so that they remain relevant,” it added.

“There will still be demand in offline dating services because every person is different and there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to dating,” Lunch Actually agreed.

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Featured Image Credit: Lunch Actually, Tinder

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