



Holiday Celebrations and Small Gatherings

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Thanksgiving and COVID-19

Enjoy Thanksgiving activities and take steps to protect yourself from getting or spreading COVID-19. Learn more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful and isolating for many people. Gatherings during the upcoming holidays can be an opportunity to reconnect with family and friends. This holiday season, consider how your holiday plans can be modified to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to keep your friends, families, and communities healthy and safe.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 epidemic is worsening, and small household gatherings are an important contributor to the rise in COVID-19 cases. CDC offers the following considerations to slow the spread of COVID-19 during small gatherings. These considerations are meant to supplement—not replace—any state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which all gatherings must comply.

Considerations for Small Gatherings of Family and Friends

Celebrating virtually or with members of your own household (who are consistently taking measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19) poses the lowest risk for spread. Your household is anyone who currently lives and shares common spaces in your housing unit (such as your house or apartment). This can include family members, as well as roommates or people who are unrelated to you. People who do not currently live in your housing unit, such as college students who are returning home from school for the holidays, should be considered part of different households. In-person gatherings that bring together family members or friends from different households, including college students returning home, pose varying levels of risk.

Organizers and attendees of larger events should consider the risk of virus spread based on event size (number of attendees and other factors) and take steps to reduce the possibility of infection, as outlined in the Considerations for Events and Gatherings.

There are several factors that contribute to the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 at small in-person gatherings. In combination, these factors will create various amounts of risk:

Community levels of COVID-19 – High or increasing levels of COVID-19 cases in the gathering location, as well as in the areas where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees. Family and friends should consider the number of COVID-19 cases in their community and in the community where they plan to celebrate when deciding whether to host or attend a gathering. Information on the number of cases in an area can often be found on the local health department website.

Exposure during travel – Airports, bus stations, train stations, public transport, gas stations, and rest stops are all places travelers can be exposed to the virus in the air and on surfaces.

Location of the gathering – Indoor gatherings, especially those with poor ventilation (for example, small enclosed spaces with no outside air), pose more risk than outdoor gatherings.

Duration of the gathering – Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter gatherings. Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more greatly increases the risk of becoming sick and requires a 14-day quarantine.

Number and crowding of people at the gathering – Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. CDC does not have a limit or recommend a specific number of attendees for gatherings. The size of a holiday gathering should be determined based on the ability of attendees from different households to stay 6 feet (2 arm lengths) apart, wear masks, wash hands, and follow state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations.

Behaviors of attendees prior to the gathering – Individuals who did not consistently adhere to social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart), mask wearing, handwashing, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk than those who consistently practiced these safety measures.

Behaviors of attendees during the gathering – Gatherings with more safety measures in place, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and handwashing, pose less risk than gatherings where fewer or no preventive measures are being implemented. Use of alcohol or drugs may alter judgment and make it more difficult to practice COVID-19 safety measures.

The following people should not attend in-person holiday gatherings

People with or exposed to COVID-19

Do not host or participate in any in-person gatherings if you or anyone in your household

Has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not met the criteria for when it is safe to be around others

Has symptoms of COVID-19

Is waiting for COVID-19 viral test results

May have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days

Is at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19

Do not host or attend gatherings with anyone who has COVID-19 or has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

People at increased risk for severe illness

If you are an older adult or person with certain medical conditions who is at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or live or work with someone at increased risk of severe illness, you should avoid in-person gatherings with people who do not live in your household.

Considerations for Hosting or Attending a Gathering

If you will be hosting a gathering during the holiday season that brings people who live in different households together, follow CDC tips for hosting gatherings. If you will be attending a gathering that someone else is hosting, follow CDC Considerations for Events and Gatherings. Below are some general considerations for hosting a gathering that brings together people from different households. Guests should be aware of these considerations and ask their host what mitigation measures will be in place during the gathering. Hosts should consider the following:

Check the COVID-19 infection rates in areas where attendees live on state, local, territorial, or tribal health department websites. Based on the current status of the pandemic, consider if it is safe to hold or attend the gathering on the proposed date.

Limit the number of attendees as much as possible to allow people from different households to remain at least 6 feet apart at all times. Guests should avoid direct contact, including handshakes and hugs, with others not from their household.

Host outdoor rather than indoor gatherings as much as possible. Even outdoors, require guests to wear masks when not eating or drinking.

Avoid holding gatherings in crowded, poorly ventilated spaces with persons who are not in your household.

Increase ventilation by opening windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather, or by placing central air and heating on continuous circulation.

For additional information on increasing ventilation, visit CDC's information on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Home.

Winter weather can be cold, wet, and unpredictable. Inclement weather makes it difficult to increase ventilation by opening windows or to hold an event outdoors.

If setting up outdoor seating under a pop-up open air tent, ensure guests are still seated with physical distancing in mind. Enclosed 4-wall tents will have less air circulation than open air tents. If outdoor temperature or weather forces you to put up the tent sidewalls, consider leaving one or more sides open or rolling up the bottom 12" of each sidewall to enhance ventilation while still providing a wind break.

Require guests to wear masks. At gatherings that include persons of different households, everyone should always wear a mask that covers both the mouth and nose, except when eating or drinking. It is also important to stay at least 6 feet away from people who are not in your household at all times.

Encourage guests to avoid singing or shouting, especially indoors. Keep music levels down so people don't have to shout or speak loudly to be heard.

Encourage attendees to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Provide guests information about any COVID-19 safety guidelines and steps that will be in place at the gathering to prevent the spread of the virus.

Provide and/or encourage attendees to bring supplies to help everyone to stay healthy. These include extra masks (do not share or swap with others), hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, and tissues. Stock bathrooms with enough hand soap and single use towels.

Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items such as serving utensils.

Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between use when feasible. Use EPA-approved disinfectant^{external icon}.

Use touchless garbage cans if available. Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. Wash hands after removing gloves.

Plan ahead and ask guests to avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.

Treat pets as you would other human family members – do not let pets interact with people outside the household.

The more of these prevention measures that you put in place, the safer your gathering will be. No one measure is enough to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Food and drinks at small holiday gatherings

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that handling food or eating is associated with directly spreading COVID-19. It is possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, including food, food packaging, or utensils that have the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way that the virus is spread. Remember, it is always important to follow food safety practices to reduce the risk of illness from common foodborne germs.

Encourage guests to bring food and drinks for themselves and for members of their own household only; avoid potluck-style gatherings.

Wear a mask while preparing food for or serving food to others who don't live in your household.

All attendees should have a plan for where to store their mask while eating and drinking. Keep it in a dry, breathable bag (like a paper or mesh fabric bag) to keep it clean between uses.

Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible.

Have one person who is wearing a mask serve all the food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.

Use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, plates and utensils, and condiments.

Make sure everyone washes their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after preparing, serving, and eating food and after taking trash out. Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

Designate a space for guests to wash hands after handling or eating food.

Limit crowding in areas where food is served by having one person dispense food individually to plates, always keeping a minimum of a 6-foot distance from the person whom they are serving. Avoid crowded buffet and drink stations. Change and launder linen items (e.g., seating covers, tablecloths, linen napkins) immediately following the event.

Offer no-touch trash cans for guests to easily throw away food items.

Wash dishes in the dishwasher or with hot soapy water immediately following the gathering.

Travel and Overnight Stays

If you decide to travel, follow these safety measures during your trip to protect yourself and others from COVID-19:

Wear a mask in public settings, like on public and mass transportation, at events and gatherings, and anywhere you will be around other people.

Avoid close contact by staying at least 6 feet apart (about 2 arm lengths) from anyone who is not from your household.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).

Avoid contact with anyone who is sick.

Avoid touching your face mask, eyes, nose, and mouth.

Travel increases the chance of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Use information from the following webpages to decide whether to travel during the holidays:

Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Know Your Travel Risk

Know When to Delay Your Travel to Avoid Spreading COVID-19

Consider whether you, someone you live with, or anyone you plan to visit with is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, to determine whether to stay overnight in the same residence or to stay elsewhere.

Assess risk for infection based on how you or your visitor will travel.

Consider and prepare for what you will do if you, or someone else, becomes sick during the visit. What are the plans for isolation, medical care, basic care, and travel home?

Tips for staying overnight or hosting overnight guests

Visitors should launder clothing and mask, and stow luggage away from common areas upon arrival.

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially upon arrival.

Wear masks while inside the house. Masks may be removed for eating, drinking, and sleeping, but individuals from different households should stay at least 6 feet away from each other at all times.

Improve ventilation by opening windows and doors or by placing central air and heating on continuous circulation.

Spend time together outdoors. Take a walk or sit outdoors at least 6 feet apart for interpersonal interactions.

Avoid singing or shouting, especially indoors.

Treat pets as you would other human family members – do not let pets interact with people outside the household.

Monitor hosts and guests for symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

Hosts and guests should have a plan for what to do if someone becomes sick.

Get your flu vaccine

Gatherings can contribute to the spread of other infectious diseases. Getting a flu vaccine is an essential part of protecting your health and your family's health this season. Flu vaccines are useful any time during the flu season and can often be accessed into January or later.

Steps to take if exposed to COVID-19 during a holiday gathering

If you are exposed to COVID-19 at a holiday gathering, while traveling, or at any time, quarantine yourself to protect others by doing the following:

Stay home for 14 days after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19.

Stay away from others, especially people who are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Watch for fever (100.4°F or higher), cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19

Consider getting tested for COVID-19. Even if you test negative for COVID-19 or feel healthy, you should still stay home (quarantine) for 14 days after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19. This is because symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus, and some infected people never have symptoms but are still contagious.

Do not travel until 14 days after your last possible exposure.

If you can't completely stay away from others during the 14 days:

Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arm lengths) away from other people.

Wear a mask that covers both the mouth and nose when you are outside of your home.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol).

Monitor yourself and household members for symptoms of COVID-19.

Get information about COVID-19 testing if you feel sick.

If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 within 14 days of the event or celebration, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, or if you test positive for COVID-19, immediately notify the host and others who attended. They may need to inform other attendees about their possible exposure to the virus. Contact your health care provider and follow the CDC-recommended steps for what to do if you become sick, and follow the public health recommendations for community-related exposure.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, a public health worker may contact you to check on your health and ask you who you have been in contact with and where you've spent time in order to identify and provide support to people (contacts) who may have been infected. Your information will be confidential. Learn more about what to expect with contact tracing.pdf icon

Holiday celebrations

Holiday celebrations will likely need to be different this year to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Avoid activities that are higher risk for spread. Consider fun alternatives that pose lower risk of spreading COVID-19.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a time when many families travel long distances to celebrate together. Travel increases the chance of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. If you must travel, be informed of the risks involved.

Lower risk activities

Having a small dinner with only people who live in your household

Preparing traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and delivering them in a way that doesn't involve contact with others

Having a virtual dinner and sharing recipes with friends and family

Shopping online rather than in person on the day after Thanksgiving or the next Monday

Watching sports events, parades, and movies from home

Moderate risk activities

Having a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community

Lower your risk by following CDC's recommendations on hosting gatherings or cook-outs.

Visiting pumpkin patches or orchards where people use hand sanitizer before touching pumpkins or picking apples, wearing masks is encouraged or enforced, and people are able to maintain social distancing

Attending a small outdoor sports events with safety precautions in place

Higher risk activities

Avoid these higher risk activities to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19:

Going shopping in crowded stores just before, on, or after Thanksgiving

Participating or being a spectator at a crowded race

Attending crowded parades

Attending large indoor gatherings with people from outside of your household

Using alcohol or drugs that may alter judgment and make it more difficult to practice COVID-19 safety measures.