



'Tis the season to be safe

The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful and isolating for many people. Gatherings during the upcoming holidays may 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.

Regrettably, the situation is worsening and small household gatherings are an unfortunate contributor to the rise in COVID-19 cases.

The State of Utah wants everyone to have a safe and enjoyable holiday season. If you are planning Thanksgiving or other fall holiday activities, we have some tips and recommendations to keep you and your family safe during the holidays.

General Guidelines for Holiday Gatherings

The more people from different households a person interacts with at a gathering, the closer the physical interaction is, and the longer the interaction lasts, the higher the risk that a person who has COVID-19 may spread it to others, whether he or she has symptoms or not.

One of the reasons that COVID-19 continues to spread at social gatherings may be from the misconception that small social gatherings with people close to you, such as friends, neighbors, or extended family, are safe options. However, that is not necessarily the case if you aren't taking precautions, such as physical distancing and wearing masks. Any time you bring people together from different households, it significantly increases your risk for infection, especially when infection rates are as high as they presently are.

The safest option is to limit your celebrations to the people you live with and include others virtually.

If you decide to host a holiday gathering that includes people who don't live in your home, you should take extra precautions.

- The smaller the number of people, the safer.
- Only invite people you're around often. You reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 when you limit the amount of people you are in close contact with.
- Avoid going to multiple gatherings with people from different households.
- The host should keep a list of the names and contact information for anyone who attends the gathering, in case contact tracing is needed later.



There are some situations where you should not host or attend gatherings this holiday season. The situations include if you:

- Have symptoms of COVID-19 or are sick.
- May have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Are waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- Tested positive for COVID-19 and should be in isolation.
- Were exposed to COVID-19 and should be quarantined.
- Are at [higher-risk](#) for severe illness from COVID-19, or live or work with someone at higher-risk.
 - You should not go to any holiday or social gatherings this fall with people who don't live in your home if you are at higher-risk or live or work with someone at higher-risk.
 - If you are at higher-risk or live or work with someone at higher-risk and decide to attend an in-person gathering with people who do not live in your home, consider lower-risk activities.

Things to do Before Your Gathering

If you plan to host or attend a holiday gathering with people who don't live in your home, take precautions beforehand to make it as safe as possible. Planning ahead this holiday season can help keep everyone safe.

Plan for wearing a face covering or mask.

Some people may not think about bringing a face covering with them to a holiday gathering such as Thanksgiving dinner. Let your guests know in advance that everyone at your gathering should be wearing a mask while indoors and when not actively eating or drinking.

COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. COVID-19 can be spread by people who do not have symptoms and do not know they are sick.

- It is important for everyone to wear a cloth or disposable face covering when people from different households are attending the same indoor gathering. Cloth and disposable face coverings provide an extra layer to help stop respiratory droplets from traveling in the air and onto other people.
- [According to the CDC](#), when you wear a face covering, your risk of getting sick with COVID-19 is decreased. Wearing a face covering also helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Make sure everyone's face covering covers their mouth and nose.
- Do not use cloth or disposable face coverings on children younger than age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without help.
- You may want to have extra face coverings available for your guests, in the event someone forgets theirs.



Think about your guest list.

Keep your guest list as small as possible. The more people there are at a holiday gathering the higher the risk of spreading the virus between guests.

Try to only invite people you're around often. You reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 when you limit the amount of people you are in close contact with. Avoid having people who have attended multiple gatherings at your gathering. You can limit your risk by spending time with the same people.

Encourage virtual attendance for those who cannot, or should not, attend in person.

Plan for physical distancing.

Make sure everyone at your gathering can stay at least 6 feet apart from anyone they don't live with, especially when they are eating.

Arrange seating so there is at least 6 feet of distance (in all directions—front-to-back and side-to-side) between different households. Physical distancing is very important if the people who attend are coming from different areas or if guests don't usually wear a mask, practice physical distancing, good handwashing and hygiene practices, or take other preventive measures.

Plan an outdoor gathering, if possible.

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

Obviously, outdoor gatherings may not be possible in many parts of our state. If you can host an outdoor gathering you should. But even outdoors, require guests to wear masks when not actively eating or drinking. If eating indoors, open the windows and turn on a fan to increase air circulation.

Consider the length of the gathering.

Gatherings that last longer are higher-risk than shorter ones. 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.

Get your flu shot, and ask your guests to get theirs, too.

Holiday gatherings not only increase your risk of getting COVID-19, but your risk of getting other infectious diseases as well.

This fall and winter, getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever since hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices are likely to be busy caring for COVID-19 patients.

Getting a flu vaccine will help to:

- Keep you and your loved ones out of the medical setting.
- Save scarce medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients.
- Protect the frontline health care workers who will be caring for people sick with respiratory illnesses this fall and winter.



Things to do During Your Gathering

Gatherings with more safety measures in place, such as mask wearing, physical distancing, and handwashing, pose less risk than gatherings where fewer or no preventive measures are being implemented.

Everyone at your gathering should wear a mask or face covering.

While indoors, guests should wear a face mask during your gathering from the time they enter the gathering until they leave, unless they are actively eating or drinking.

If your family traditions include such traditions as singing or playing wind instruments, these traditions should be postponed and enjoyed at a later time, unless they are done outdoors and guests and performers are physically distanced from one another.

Limit close contact with other guests.

Stay at least six feet away from people who don't live in your home. You should practice physical distancing even when you are wearing a face covering.

You should try to avoid physical contact with other people. Don't shake hands, bump elbows, or give hugs. We know it's hard to do with loved ones, but this year, just wave or verbally greet them instead.

Watch what you touch.

Try not to touch surfaces or shared items that other people touch often. Clean and disinfect surfaces and shared items that are touched often with [EPA-approved disinfectants](#).

Remind everyone to wash their hands more often than they normally would.

Good hygiene practices are some of the best ways to fight any illness. This includes COVID-19. Make sure guests wash their hands with soap and water when they first arrive and before they eat.

Have hand sanitizer available for guests to use at many locations throughout the gathering.

Wash your hands often for 20 seconds with soap and water. If you do not have soap and water, use hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.



Stay safe when you are preparing your meal and eating.

You should always follow good hygiene to reduce the risk of illness from common foodborne germs. It is possible for you to get COVID-19 when you touch a surface or object. This includes if you touch food, food packaging, or utensils that have the virus on it and then touch your own mouth, nose, or possibly your eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way that the virus is spread. Therefore, you should:

- Wear a mask when you prepare or serve food.
- Make sure everyone washes their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after preparing, serving, and eating food. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid potluck-style meals or having guests bring food or drinks prepared outside of your home.
- Limit the number of people who go in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible.
- If you serve food, consider having one person serve all the food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
- Have single-use options or have one person who serves sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, plates and utensils, and condiments.
- Avoid any self-serve food or drink options, like buffets or buffet-style potlucks, salad bars, and condiment or drink stations.
- Try to use disposable items. If you choose to use any items that are reusable (seating covers, tablecloths, linen napkins), wash and disinfect them after the event.

After your gathering

If you participated in higher risk activities or think you may have been exposed to COVID-19 during a social gathering, take extra precautions (in addition the ones listed above) for 14 days after the event to protect others:

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Avoid being around people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Consider getting tested for COVID-19.
- If you get symptoms of COVID-19 or if you test positive for COVID-19, contact the host and the other people who were at the event right away. They may need to quarantine and be tested. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle aches and pains, or a decrease in your sense of taste or smell.
- Call your doctor or healthcare provider and isolate right away until you know whether or not you have the virus.
- If you are waiting for your COVID-19 test results, stay home until you have a result, and follow the [recommendations](#) to protect yourself and others and stop the spread of COVID-19.



If you are notified that you were a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19:

- Stay home for 14 days from the last time you had contact with that person.
- Watch for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Get information about [COVID-19 testing](#) if you feel sick.

For more information, visit the [CDC tips for hosting gatherings](#).

How do I stay safe if I am traveling for the holidays?

If you travel, it increases the chance you may get and spread COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Use information from trusted sources to help you decide whether you should travel for the holidays.

There are currently no COVID-19 travel restrictions in the state of Utah. Several states and cities across the U.S. have a mandatory testing or 14-day quarantine upon arrival for those traveling from certain areas. Please visit the state website of the area you are traveling to for information. You can find other travel-related resources here:

- <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/travel/>
- [Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Know Your Travel Risk](#)
- [Know When to Delay Your Travel to Avoid Spreading COVID-19](#)

If you decide to travel, take steps to stay safe during your trip to protect yourself and others.

- Wear a face covering or mask in public places. This includes public and mass transportation, at events and gatherings, and anywhere you will be around other people.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who doesn't live in your home (stay at least 6 feet apart).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Don't get near anyone who is sick.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Try not to touch surfaces many people touch.

Visit the [CDC website](#) for tips on safely hosting visitors in your home

