



A Pandemic  
Holiday

# Avoiding Holiday COVID Risks

The holidays will certainly look a lot different this year with many of us avoiding travel to prevent the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

Restrictions across the country will likely keep many of us from attending the in-person gatherings with our friends and families that we are so used to.

These barriers should not dampen your holiday spirit, however. There are many ways to celebrate while still staying safe.

Read on for tips on gatherings, and do your best to keep your family members and friends safe this holiday season.

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND GATHERINGS?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following people should not attend in-person holiday gatherings:

- People with or exposed to COVID-19.
- People with symptoms of COVID-19.
- People waiting for COVID-19 viral test results.
- People who may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- People at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.



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In addition, 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, the CDC recommends that you avoid in-person gatherings with people who do not live in your household.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Before planning your small

gathering this holiday season, here are some questions to consider from the Nuvance Health system based in Connecticut:

- Will the event be held indoors or outdoors?
- How many people will be at the event?
- Will participants be willing/able to wear masks?
- Will participants be willing/able to practice social distancing?
- Will participants be willing/

able to practice proper hand hygiene?

- Will the visit be brief or prolonged?
- Will the event include shared food or beverages?
- Will alcohol be served at the event?
- Will participants be traveling to or from areas that are experiencing high COVID-19 infection rates?
- Will the event follow public health guidelines for gathering size limits?

• What are your personal, family and community risk factors?

Keep in mind that older adults and people who have certain health conditions — including lung disease, heart disease, diabetes or a weakened immune system — are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill and experiencing COVID-19 complications.

Always take the appropriate steps to stay safe, and to keep your family safe this season.

# Serve Food and Drinks Safely

When it comes to preparing a meal and side dishes for your holiday gathering, it's important to put a good plan together to make sure everyone stays safe and healthy.

## COVID RISKS

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is currently no evidence to suggest that handling food or eating is associated with directly spreading COVID-19. It is possible, however, that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, including food or utensils.

It will be important this year to limit crowding in areas where food is served. This means designating one person to dispense food individually to plates and avoiding dessert or drink stations.

The server should remember to always keep a minimum of a 6-foot distance from the person whom they are serving.

## COVID SAFETY TIPS

Here are a few tips for ensuring a safe, delicious holiday meal.

- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared.
- Wear a mask while preparing food for or serving food to others.
- Encourage guests to bring



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food and drinks for themselves; avoid potluck style meals.

- Consider using single-use options for condiments and utensils.
- Make sure everyone washes their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after preparing, serving and eating food.
- Wash dishes in the dishwasher or with hot, soapy

water immediately following the gathering.

## ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS

Outside of the threat of COVID, there are many other safety precautions to take when preparing and serving your holiday meal. No matter how many people will be at your holiday gathering, it is

always important to follow food safety practices to reduce the risk of illness from common food-borne germs.

Here are a few additional tips from the CDC:

- Cook food thoroughly. Meat, chicken, turkey, seafood and eggs can carry germs that cause food poisoning, so use a food thermometer to ensure these foods have been cooked

to a safe internal temperature.

- Keep food out of the “danger zone” — between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit— which is where bacteria can grow rapidly.
- After food is cooked, keep hot food hot and cold food cold. Refrigerate or freeze any perishable food within two hours.

# Traveling for the Holidays

Even as restrictions continue to tighten across the country, there are still some areas allowing for travel this holiday season.

Experts warn that travel increases your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend staying home as the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

As you consider traveling for the holidays, it's important that you research the current amount of active cases at your destination. The higher the number, the more likely you are to get infected during travel and spread the virus to others when you return.

The CDC recommends that you avoid travel if you are sick or if you have been around someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days. They also suggest against traveling with someone who is sick.

Anyone can get very ill from the virus that causes COVID-19, but older adults and people with certain underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. That's why it's important to recognize and fully understand the possible impact on others before you decide to travel.



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## CHECK TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

According to the CDC, some state, local and territorial governments have requirements, such as requiring people to wear masks and requiring those who recently traveled to stay home for up to 14 days. Check with these organizations in your area for this information before you travel.

If you are traveling internationally, the CDC recommends you check the destination's Office of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Health or the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Country Information, for details about entry requirements and restrictions for arriving travelers, such as mandatory testing or quarantine.

## SAFETY TIPS

If you decide to travel, follow these CDC safety measures during your trip to protect yourself and others from contracting the COVID-19 virus.

- Wear a mask in public settings, like on public and mass transportation, at events and gatherings, and anywhere you will be around people outside of your household.

- Avoid close contact by staying at least 6 feet apart 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.

# Host a Virtual Celebration

Technology has made it possible for us to still connect with families during difficult lockdowns and quarantines. Choose from a variety of online platforms to build a virtual forum, send invitations and plan fun activities.

The last thing you need in 2020 is more stress, so enlist the help of a family member or friend if you're not familiar with these types of online programs.

## HOW TO THROW A VIRTUAL PARTY

Virtual holiday parties require the same amount of planning as in-person holidays. Taking the time to incorporate special details will make your guests appreciate the party even more.

Here are some essentials:

- A strong internet connection.
- An easy-to-use software platform.
- Plenty of notice for your guests.
- A holiday theme.
- A couple of fun group activities.

Whether you're planning a party for your family, friends or office, remember to keep things light and enjoyable. The last thing you want to do



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when hosting a virtual party is to make your guests feel like they are wasting their time.

## DON'T FORGET THE DETAILS

Remember that many of your friends and family may be suffering from video conference fatigue due to the increased number of online

calls their jobs may have required in 2020.

Be flexible with guests joining and leaving when they can, especially given their extra responsibilities juggling work, kids, school and chores around the house these days.

If you have a theme in mind, be sure to share it with your guests ahead of time so

they can buy any materials, food, drinks or outfits that you recommend. Picture planning a virtual wine and cheese tasting but forgetting to tell your guests to buy wine and cheese! If you're throwing the party, it's your responsibility to make sure these details aren't missed.

Sending supplies to your

virtual guests in advance is an easy way to get everyone excited and prepared for the party, so make sure you budget for any extra costs you may have to incur or ask guests to chip in.

Follow these tips and you'll be on your way to throwing a perfect virtual holiday party this year.

# Ways to Celebrate At Home

With many of us facing the reality of a homebound holiday this year, there will be opportunities to start new traditions with our immediate families.

Even though this may be different than what we're used to, a positive attitude and creative thinking can make this holiday one to remember.

Read on for a few ideas of how to create a fun, festive holiday.

## HOLIDAY MOVIE NIGHT

Is there anything more enjoyable than binging your favorite holiday movies with a healthy helping of snacks and goodies? Choose a few of the all-time great holiday flicks and plan a movie night with your family.

You can even use the extra time to introduce older, classic movies to your kids. You never know, they may enjoy some of the same movies you grew up watching as a child.

## SANTA VISITS

There probably aren't a lot of options to visit a mall and sit on Santa's lap this year. That's OK! You can still give your kids a visit from Old Saint Nick. It just may take some creativity.

If a member from your household can dress up as Santa instead of hiring someone, have them make a



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Christmas day visit to not only your house, but any other nearby family homes (from a distance) to bring some joy to the holiday.

## VISIT A CHRISTMAS TREE FARM

Visits to live Christmas tree farms are on the rise this year

as families look for fun, safe activities to do outside of the house. Many of these farms are small businesses run by local families, so by supporting them you're actually helping stimulate the local economy during what has otherwise been a tough year.

Find a festive place near you

with drinks or activities to make a fun day of it. Bring your kids along and let them play a part in picking out the tree to make the day extra special.

## KEEP IT SAFE

Stay organized with COVID precautions that you can keep top of mind. Factor in extra

cleaning supplies and sanitizers when setting your budget for decorations, especially if you plan to safely decorate with friends or family members. If you're hosting a small gathering, make sure to set up hand sanitizer stations at all entrances or exits, in the kitchen and in bathrooms.



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# Boost Your Spirits with Decor

The holidays offer a wonderful opportunity to unleash your creativity and bring joy to others through your decorating skills. And we can sure all use some holiday cheer as 2020 comes to an end.

From the materials you use and the placement of your decorations, designing offers you the chance to make a positive, lasting statement this holiday season.

We've got some tips below — both practical and creative — to help you achieve your decorating dreams this

holiday season and keep your spirits up.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

The secret to the best holiday decorating ideas is simplicity. Modern LED lighting is all the rage this year as families look to doll up the outside of their houses and their trees while also remaining energy efficient. This proves you can be creative and sensible this season.

Some non-lighting ideas for brightening your home this holiday season include homemade ornaments, candle displays and kid-friendly crafts that can serve as wall or window art. Visit your local craft store — either in person or online — for inspiration and ideas.

## FESTIVE FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Flowers are a stunning way to bring new life into your home, especially during the holiday season. Stick to Earth's natural tones and rough woods to pull off a true festive look. From poinsettias to simple pines, you can decorate any type of plant with trinkets or ornaments to achieve the holiday spirit.

Fresh evergreens paired with thick-petaled flowers can help you pull off the perfect bouquet centerpiece for your dining room table this year.

## PERSONALIZED CHRISTMAS WREATHS

Is there anything more welcoming than a beautifully designed wreath

hanging from your front door? A home-made wreath is a great way to show off your design skills while also creating a conversation piece for family and friends — even if they can only see it through social media this year.

Items you may need to design your own wreath may include: Floral wire, snips, craft glue, ribbons, branches, pliers, gloves, sprigs, snowberries and holly. Challenge yourself and don't be afraid to get creative on your choice of materials.

If you don't want to design your own wreath, check with your local crafting or floral shops to see if they are offering pick-up or home delivery this year. This would be a great way to support local business while also giving your home some beautiful holiday flair.

# Don't Forget the Needy

Generosity is needed more than ever this holiday season. This year has been extremely difficult for underprivileged families and the homeless across the world.

If you have some free time or have been fortunate enough to be financially unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be an opportunity for you to make a big difference for these populations.

## HOW TO SAFELY VOLUNTEER

Volunteers make a profound difference in the lives of others.

Did you know that volunteering can benefit your own health as well? Research shows that volunteers experience a “helper’s high,” increased trust in others and enhanced social interaction.

Here are a few common benefits of volunteering, according to The Mayo Clinic:

- Decreases the risk of depression, especially for individuals 65 and older.
- Gives a sense of purpose and teaches valuable skills.
- Helps people stay physically and mentally active.
- Enhances a person’s social network by helping you meet others and develop new relationships.



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## SAFELY VOLUNTEERING

Even with COVID-related restrictions on gathering and events, there are many ways to safely volunteer. Here are a few ideas from AmeriCorps:

- Volunteer at a food bank that needs help packing and sorting food using safe practices. Visit Feeding America or Food Pantries to find an organization near you.
- Deliver meals and groceries

to vulnerable seniors.

- Check with your local schools to see if they need volunteers to distribute food.
- Blood donations have decreased dramatically, so you can help fill the need by contacting your local Red Cross or other blood donation sites.

## MAKE DONATIONS TO YOUR FAVORITE CAUSE

Nonprofit organizations

have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Without the ability to host annual fundraising events, their budgets and ability to help those in need have lessened dramatically.

You can make a big difference this year by making a financial donation to their cause. Find a reputable organization in your local area to support. Once you decide, chal-

lenge your friends and families to join your mission.

You can do so through regular conversations at your holiday gathering, or by starting a campaign on your favorite social media platform.

No matter how you decide to get involved, you can be a light to your community through volunteering or donations for these critical nonprofit organizations.