

# Holidays and COVID-19

## Frequently Asked Questions

November 2020

### How can you reduce the risk for COVID-19 during holiday gatherings?

*Any gathering that includes individuals not living in the same household increases the risk for COVID-19. If gatherings include individuals not living in a household, here are recommendations for reducing risk of COVID-19 transmission. It is best to use multiple strategies to prevent infection.*

Make the number in attendance as few as possible. According to CDC, even small family gatherings can spread COVID-19. Follow guidance from state and local officials on how many people can attend gatherings.

Know behaviors of your guests prior to the gathering. Do they follow local and state guidelines of social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, and other prevention behaviors? If so, they pose less of a risk than those that do not.

Reduce the number of people traveling from locations with high case counts or have recently visited high risk locations within 14 days of the gathering. They pose a higher risk.

Consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.

Encourage guests not to come if they have been in contact with anyone with COVID-19 or have any symptoms of infection.

Open windows or screened doors to allow for better ventilation. Avoid using fans that blow directly at people since this can spread any airborne or aerosolized viruses.

Make arrangements for seating outside if the weather permits.

Keep the length of gatherings as short as possible. Shorter gatherings pose less of a risk than longer ones.

- Prepare foods ahead of time so that people do not congregate in the kitchen while food is being prepared.
- Use the time for eating and not for viewing television and sports.

Move chairs apart to encourage guests to maintain some social distancing. Rather than using one large table, set up small tables so that guests can spread out.

Provide disposable face masks and hand sanitizer for guests or encourage them to bring them.

Assure guests who choose not to risk attending the gathering that you support their decision. Consider delivering them a plate of food if possible.



### What can you do to limit contact with commonly touched surfaces?

*Frequently touched surfaces include tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.*

Clean surfaces using soap and water, then use disinfectant. Do this before guests arrive and after they leave.

Serve each guest rather than serving family style. Avoid buffets that encourage people to congregate in close spaces and share utensils.

Use disposable plates and bowls so that clean ones can be provided for seconds or refills.

Serve condiments in individual containers such as plastic or paper souffle cups.

Provide plenty of paper napkins or paper towels.

Make name cards for each seat at the table to encourage guests sit in one seat.

Place sanitizing wipes in common areas such as restrooms along with soap and paper towels. This will allow guests to sanitize surfaces.

Provide a touchless garbage can if you have one.

## Should gatherings be potluck?

The main consideration with potluck is whether or not it encourages people to congregate around a small area and share the same utensils. A positive thing about potlucks is that it takes some of the workload off the person hosting the gathering and it can shorten the time everyone is together since the food is prepared ahead of time. Ideally, one person should serve each guest so that utensils are not shared.

Another idea would be to have guests bring their own packaged food with their own utensils. Or, you can prepare grab and go bags.

## Should people be concerned about the risk of acquiring COVID-19 from food and food packaging?

Evidence suggests that COVID-19 is primarily spread from person to person through respiratory droplets, which can be airborne. If the virus is on food or food packaging, it most likely came from someone with the virus who handled the food or was nearby. Then the person touching the food or packaging touched their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. But this is not the main way it spreads.

Unlike bacteria, viruses do not grow in food. But consumers need to be reminded that food

still must be handled safely to avoid foodborne illness. Proper handwashing is important for both eliminating the spread of bacteria as well as COVID-19.

Gently rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under cold, running tap water using a brush for produce with tough skins. Do NOT wash produce with soap, bleach, sanitizer, alcohol, disinfectant or any other chemical.



## Should people disinfect their food packaging?

Currently, the risk of infection from COVID-19, from food products, food packaging, or bags is thought to be low. Therefore, there is no recommendation from CDC on disinfecting food packaging.

You should NOT use disinfectants designed for hard surfaces, such as bleach or ammonia, on food packaged in cardboard or plastic wrap. These disinfectants should be used on hard, nonporous surfaces.

The best thing to do is to wash your hands thoroughly after handling food and food packaging.