

COVID-19: Four dimensions of safety

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As stay-at-home restrictions ease around the country, you may be wondering what risks are associated with certain activities and how you and your family can visit places and still protect your health from COVID-19. Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a Mayo Clinic pediatric infectious diseases specialist says there are four dimensions to different activities

that she would encourage you to consider as you decide whether something is safe for you or your family.

"Time, space, people and [place](#)," says Dr. Rajapakse. "Using that rule, you can think about a few things that might help you determine the risk of a certain activity."

Time

"Shorter activities generally will have a lower risk associated with them," says Dr. Rajapakse. "If we take the example of a [restaurant](#), going to get curb-side pickup or takeout from a restaurant will have a [lower risk](#) associated than having a long, three- or four-hour sit down meal at a restaurant."

Space

"Wherever you're planning to go, how much space will you have around you and how much control do you have over that space? We've been recommending the six-foot of distance based on the droplet transmission that COVID is spread." Dr. Rajapakse says, "For example, in a restaurant setting, many restaurants have taken precautions and moved their tables six-feet apart so you're not in close contact with other people. Looking at aspects of [space](#) are really important when it comes to transmission of infection."

People

"People refers to how busy the area is. If there's a large crowd of people, your risk of getting infected is going to be higher than in an area where there's few people or no one aside from yourself and your family.

If you walk into a restaurant and it's packed full of people, that is probably a high-risk setting and you probably want to avoid places like that," says Dr. Rajapakse.

Whether the other people around are wearing a mask or not, especially when it comes to activities in indoor or enclosed settings, is also an important factor to pay attention to when making a decision.

Place

"Place refers to whether the activity is taking place inside or outside," says Dr. Rajapakse. "We know that transmission is much less likely to occur in outdoor settings. If you go to a restaurant, for example, and you have an option to sit out on a patio rather than inside the restaurant itself, that's another decision you can make to reduce your risk."

Using those four dimensions, Dr. Rajapakse says could be a tool that you can use to assess risk in any situation that you're thinking of as you're making plans outside of your home. Being flexible with your plans and having a Plan B ready if you determine Plan A is too high risk can help avoid disappointment.

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