

# Can you visit your dad safely on Father's Day? A doctor gives you a checklist

June 18 2020, by Claudia Finkelstein

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As a physician, daughter and socially responsible human, I'm finding Father's Day to be complicated for me this year, as it is for millions. Questions of whether and how to see my adult children and my own elderly father present medical and ethical quandaries. As an [associate professor of family medicine](#) with a focus on wellness, I'd like to share with you my thinking about this using some tools to aid discernment as Father's Day approaches.

Wouldn't it be great if choosing time with parents or offspring were ever an easy decision to make? However, the answer is rarely that simple. This year, in the midst of a global pandemic and the need to [continue to practice social distancing](#) as states loosen stay-at-home guidelines, the decision is even more complex than usual.

I have come up with a [matrix](#) to help you decide how to safely celebrate in a fact-based and safe manner. This matrix weighs the many factors to consider, specifically related to the pandemic.

## Personal risk

Assessing your personal risk is one aspect of the matrix. Are you or is your father in a high-risk group? Presence of chronic disease or age over 65 are two major risks. You can check this [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chart](#) for more specific details.

Besides your specific personal risks, are either of you in repeated contact with the public through your job? Did you participate in the protests or spend time in other crowded public events?

Are you [symptomatic](#)?

Have you been exposed to a carrier? Are young children, who can be asymptomatic carriers, in the picture?

If any of these questions is answered with a yes, it is certainly wise to forgo any thought of an in-person visit. If all are no, you can proceed to the next part of the matrix.

## Where you live matters

Are you in a high-prevalence area for coronavirus or in a state with rising rates? If you are in a sparsely populated area with low regional prevalence, it makes more sense to consider an in-person visit than if you (or he) live in a place with a high number of cases or rising numbers of cases. Check your [local prevalence here](#).

If neither of you is at elevated risk and you are not in an extremely high-prevalence area, the next question is: Can you see each other in person without violating any orders? Consult [this link for reopening plans](#) affecting your state.

Remember that the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico also have restrictions, including a [self-quarantine for 14 days after arriving in Canada](#). Obviously, any need to travel and ability to quarantine must enter the matrix calculation.

Finally, can your in-person visit follow social distancing recommendations? Can you be six feet apart—ideally, outdoors—wash

hands frequently and avoid physical contact? Remember, it may be tough not to hug, especially if you do decide to bring children.

If so, finally, you need to examine your own and your father's risk tolerance. If either of you is extremely anxious, stick to virtual connection.

Love and gratitude, while ideally communicated in person, can still be expressed virtually or by phone. You may overtly acknowledge that the greater act of love for each other, as well as your community, is to stay home.

These days we have been asked to reexamine what "normal" looks like in so many ways. Perhaps the increased opportunity for reflection afforded by the pandemic, as well as the restrictions imposed, will teach us to honor our loved ones in many small ways throughout the year. The gift of attention—by phone, email or snail mail—is always possible.

And remember that another holiday—July 4—is just around the corner, and you will need to think about safety then, too.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Can you visit your dad safely on Father's Day? A doctor gives you a checklist (2020, June 18) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-dad-safely-father-day-doctor.html>

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