

College kid coming home for Thanksgiving? Here's how to keep your family safe

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As college students prepare to leave their campuses for Thanksgiving or

study remotely for the rest of the semester, families should consider their risks and work to reduce them, according to an infectious disease expert.

Dr. David Cennimo, an assistant professor in pediatric infectious disease at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark, offered suggestions on how families could approach the holiday while COVID-19 is a concern.

Families should analyze their own risks, not necessarily doing what other families are doing, he said. One [college student](#) might have young, healthy parents and siblings, while another lives with an 80-year-old grandparent who has health issues, Cennimo said.

Here are some steps families can take:

- **Do your research.** Look at what the [college](#) has reported for current infections, as well as the number of infections reported in the area where the college is located.
- **Stay safe at school.** Some suggest quarantining before coming home. That may not be possible if classes are held in person, but students can reduce their risks by wearing a mask everywhere, eating in their rooms instead of dining halls and avoiding indoor gatherings.
- **Travel more safely.** It's safest for students to drive home alone or have a family member pick them up. If they have to travel via train or airplane, they should avoid eating, drinking and the restroom, if possible. They should also wear a mask the entire time, use hand sanitizer frequently, spread out from others and follow their home state's quarantine regulations for out-of-state visitors.
- **Talk to your student.** Parents should have a frank and specific

conversation about what students have been doing at school. Families should consider that their children could be infected.

- **Set rules for safety.** Meeting up at a hometown bar with friends who have been studying at other colleges may be a tradition, but "this scenario is a mixing chamber," Cennimo said in a Rutgers news release. If they're meeting, especially indoors, they're increasing odds for infection. Parents can set reasonable expectations for how their child can safely meet friends, possibly outdoors at a park. The key is reducing risk.
- **Consider testing.** Tests provide great data, but only for that moment in time. If a student flies on a Tuesday night and gets a negative test on a Wednesday, that [student](#) could still test positive 10 days later, Cennimo said.

So should you gather?

Nuclear family celebrations or Thanksgiving dinners over Zoom are best this year, Cennimo said. If you invite extended [family](#) members, celebrate outside, if possible. If indoors, spread out, wear a mask when not eating or drinking and open doors and windows to improve ventilation. It's fresh air you want, not fans circulating air. Consider reintroducing the kids table to protect at-risk [family members](#).

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers [additional Thanksgiving tips](#).

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