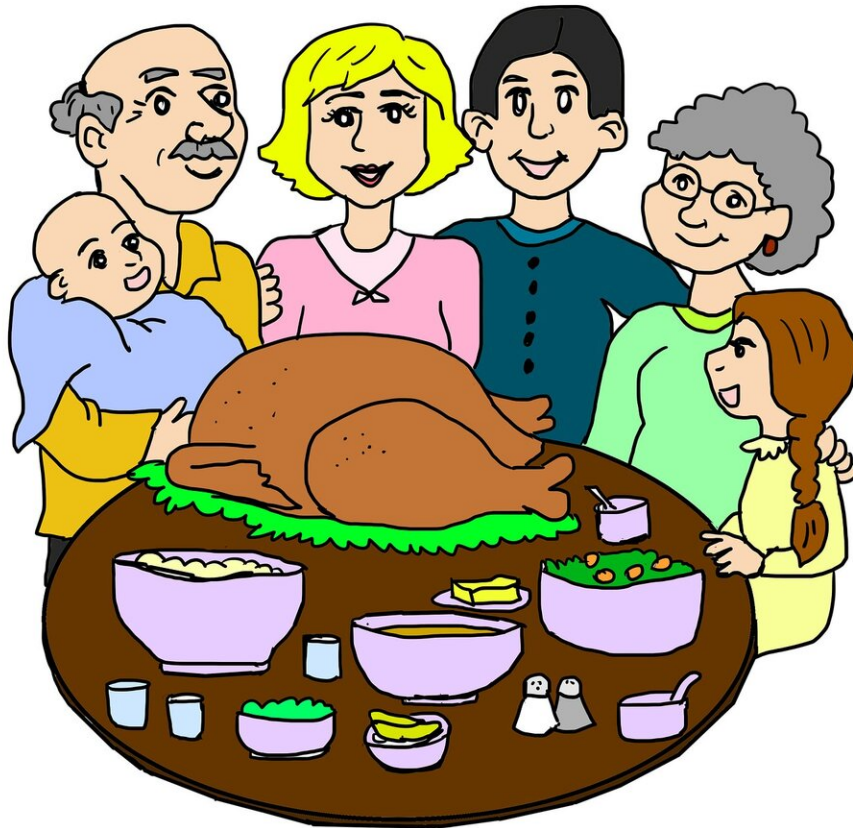


Are holiday gatherings too risky during the pandemic?

December 7 2020, by Dr. Jennifer Shu, American Academy Of Pediatrics



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Q: Are holiday gatherings a bad idea during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: For many families, the holidays are about getting together with relatives and friends. But as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, gatherings with people outside your household continue to be risky. Public health experts say that small household gatherings are among the key reasons COVID-19 cases are rising this fall.

With some extra planning and lower risk activities, though, your [family](#) can create lasting memories while lowering the risk of being exposed to or spreading COVID-19. Here are some tips I'm sharing with families in my practice this year:

Celebrate with members of your own household. Limit any in-person celebration to people you live with. Cooking with your children and decorating your home are great ways to enjoy each other's company while protecting your family and others from COVID-19.

Find creative ways to share the experience remotely. Prepare a favorite recipe with extended family over video chat. Share what you are grateful for together at the start of the [holiday](#) meal. Count down to the New Year together virtually.

Consider a dropoff potluck. Another way to share the holiday spirit is to prepare traditional recipes for family and neighbors. Instead of sharing them in person, delight them with a doorstep dropoff.

— Grocery shop online and help elderly or higher-risk loved ones. Grocery shop online with delivery and curbside pickup options, if possible. Consider holiday food deliveries to elderly relatives. If you need to shop in person, go when stores are not as busy.

If you do have an in-person [gathering](#) with people outside your household, which is riskier, here are some ways to help make them safer:

Keep the gathering small and short. Keep your guest list as small as possible and reduce the amount of time you would usually visit.

Wear cloth face coverings and keep your distance. People who live together can sit together, but arrange for those from different households to stay at least 6 feet apart—especially while eating. Remind everyone to wear cloth face coverings when they're not eating.

Open windows and stay outside when possible. Open windows for better ventilation. If weather permits, gather outdoors. Stay a [safe distance](#) apart from others and wear cloth face coverings with multiple layers or medical masks, even outside.

Try a safer serving. Avoid buffet or family-style dinners and choose one person do the serving or get individual meals if ordering out. Remind children to wash hands often, and keep hand sanitizer within reach.

Remind everyone to follow safety steps beforehand. For two weeks before the gathering, remind guests to follow steps that lower the risk of COVID transmission. This includes wearing cloth face coverings, physical distancing, and limiting outings and social gatherings as much as possible. Consider offering your guests a "self-screening" checklist and ask them to join you virtually rather than in person if they don't pass the screen.

If you travel this holiday season, drive with family members in a private vehicle, if possible. Wear a mask at gas stations and rest stops. If you must travel by air, be careful around large groups clustered security lines and concourses, wear masks in airports and on planes, and hang back until lines have thinned.

Do not host or participate in any in-person festivities if you or anyone in your household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is still at risk of

spreading it to others; has had any symptoms of COVID-19 within 48 hours of the gathering; is waiting for viral test results; could have been exposed to someone in the last 14 days; or is at high risk.

Stay safe this [holiday season](#) and your family will be even more grateful for your traditions in the years to come.

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