

Physician says hand hygiene, maintaining distance can keep viruses at bay

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The holiday season is ubiquitous with family gatherings, shopping excursions in busy stores and malls, and workplace potlucks.

With all the fun and merriment of the season, it's easy to forget that these gatherings in enclosed spaces also can lead to uninvited guests: nasty colds, RSV, gastrointestinal viruses, COVID-19 and the flu.

"Getting sick during the [holidays](#) seems to feel even worse because we may be missing out on the fun while we're stuck at home recovering," says Chatura Alur, M.D., family medicine physician at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato. "But there are ways to help avoid getting sick and spreading viruses this time of year if you're careful."

Dr. Alur recommends these tips for preventing the spread of illness:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- This means staying home from school and work. Food service workers are required by law to stay home if they are sick.
- Practice proper hand hygiene.
- Wash your hands carefully with soap and [water](#), especially after using the restroom and changing diapers and before preparing foods or eating. Wash your hands more often when someone in your household is sick.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer to use prior to eating out in public, as well as after touching doors, surfaces and items in a store or other [public place](#).
- Be smart in the kitchen.
- Do not prepare [food](#) or help serve food while you are sick.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces.
- Use a household bleach solution (up to 1½ cups of bleach in one gallon of water) to clean surfaces after vomiting or diarrhea accidents.
- Avoid potluck gatherings.
- As difficult as this may be, it's good advice to stay away from homemade items just to reduce exposure to potentially

- contaminated food.
- Consider wearing a mask.
- Masks can help protect people from all respiratory viruses, not just COVID-19. If you're sick, consider wearing a mask to protect others.
- Get vaccinated.

Prevention is key. Stay current on your recommended vaccines, including influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

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