

Preventive strategies for a healthy holiday season

December 19 2023, by DeeDee Stiepan, Mayo Clinic News Network



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As the holiday season begins, it's also the season of flu and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. The southern parts of the U.S. are currently observing higher rates of RSV and influenza.

Mayo Clinic experts expect the northern half of the country will start to see higher rates of these viruses over the course of the next few weeks and months. As the holiday season approaches and more people will be gathering to celebrate in large groups, it's important to remember the preventive strategies that can protect you and your loved ones from these respiratory viruses.

Dr. Matthew Binnicker, director of the Clinical Microbiology Molecular Lab and co-director of the Clinical Virology Lab at Mayo Clinic, explains the multipronged approach he recommends for preventing and reducing [viral infections](#) during the [holiday season](#).

"Getting vaccinated is the first and foremost best step that we can take to help prevent ourselves from being infected with influenza, COVID-19 and, in certain groups, RSV," says Dr. Matthew Binnicker.

If you do feel sick, it's better to have a case of FOMO, or fear of missing out, than risk exposing others to your [illness](#).

"It's really hard to do during the holidays because you want to get together with family and friends. But if you feel sick, whether that be a gastrointestinal illness or a respiratory illness, what you need to do is stay home," says Dr. Matthew Binnicker.

Another strategy to consider is testing for COVID-19, the flu and RSV before traveling or attending gatherings.

"If you're going to be getting together with a group where there might be someone who is at higher risk for [severe disease](#), so if there's really [young children](#) who are going to be present, or if there's an elderly individual or anyone who is immunocompromised, taking a test the day of or right before the event can help catch whether someone unknowingly has a high amount of the virus," says Dr. Binnicker.

Finally, don't forget to wash your hands before and after getting together with people, especially when food is involved.

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Citation: Preventive strategies for a healthy holiday season (2023, December 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-strategies-healthy-holiday-season.html>

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