Winter Holiday Guidance

The holiday season is an important time for connecting with family and friends. Many people are used to hosting or attending large gatherings this time of year. As we approach the winter holidays, it's important to think about the best ways to keep our loved ones and our communities safe.

This year is an opportunity to reimagine what togetherness can look like. In order to keep our loved ones safe, we will need to celebrate the holidays differently this season. Staying home and celebrating with your immediate household, or celebrating with friends and family virtually, is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones this year.

Although the holidays will look different this year, there are many creative things you can do to make those closest to you feel loved while making sure they stay healthy for many more seasons to come. Here are some more ideas about how to enjoy a joyous, festive, and safer holiday season.

Top 3 Things To Remember:

- Only interact in-person with people from your household (defined as those who normally live and sleep under the same roof).
- Refrain from traveling. Celebrate virtually with the people who don't live with you.
- Avoid crowded stores. Shop for gifts online and have them delivered or pick them up curbside. Support El Paso County's economy by shopping local. Wear a mask and keep your distance whenever you do leave your home.

Holiday Celebration Ideas

As you're planning ways to celebrate the holidays safely this year, think carefully about how you might lower the risk, not only for yourself and your family, but for your community. El Paso County Public Health has prepared the following tips to help you celebrate the holidays more safely this year:

- Cooking and eating a special meal with members of your immediate household.
- Video chatting or talking on the phone with friends and family who don't live with you.
- Sharing your favorite recipes and photos of the food you've cooked via text message or email.
- Simultaneously watching your favorite holiday movie with family and friends in other households over video chat.
- Cooking and baking treats for your neighbors, friends and family, then delivering them in a way that doesn't involve face-to-face contact. You can video chat with them later as they take their first bite.
- Decorating your home with members of your household, to create a festive mood.
- Watching the ball drop on television.
- Taking a drive to see the best holiday light displays in your neighborhood.

- Taking advantage of a snowy day to go sledding, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing.
- Giving to your favorite charity.
- Take care of your mental health and check in on others. Public Health has helpful guidance for coping during the holidays here.
- When shopping for holiday gifts this year, consider taking advantage of online sales, home delivery and curbside pick-up rather than visiting crowded stores. Shop at local Colorado businesses to support the state's economy this holiday season. To support local businesses in El Paso County, visit the Pikes Peak Small Business Development Center.

Travel is not recommended

COVID-19 is currently spreading at an alarming rate throughout the United States. The safest thing to do right now is to stay home. Airport terminals, bus stations, train stations, rest stops, and hotel lobbies are all places travelers can be exposed to the virus. These are also places where it can be hard to keep your distance from others. If you must travel, take as many precautions as possible to reduce your risk of catching or spreading the virus.

Keep in mind that you may need to isolate or quarantine away from home if you become sick or are exposed to COVID-19 while traveling. You will not be able to travel across state lines while in isolation or quarantine.

If you must travel this winter, public health experts recommend:

- Quarantining before visiting and after returning home.
- Wearing a mask.
- Washing your hands frequently or using hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Staying 6 feet or more away from anyone who doesn't live with you.
- Opening windows to improve ventilation on buses, trains or shared cars.
- Postponing or cancelling your travel if you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 in the 14 days before your travel. You should get tested as soon as you develop symptoms or seven days after you think you have been exposed. For more information about testing and how to find a testing site near you, see Testing for COVID-19.

Myths

Myth: "Getting a negative COVID-19 test means I can go ahead with my normal holiday plans."

Reality: A negative test does not necessarily mean that you are free of COVID-19. Your sample may have been collected too early in your infection for COVID-19 to be detectable. Additionally, tests, especially rapid tests, are not perfect -- they may miss the virus in some infected people. It's also possible that you could contract COVID-19 in between getting tested and arriving at your destination, and then spread the virus to friends or family members, who could then get very sick or die.

Myth: "Flying is safe because COVID-19 can't spread on planes."

Reality: Flying involves many risky scenarios where you will be in close contact with strangers, like waiting in security lines and airport terminals. Even if you take all the right precautions on a plane trip, you can't control the behavior of everyone around you. Many people are currently infectious with COVID-19, which makes flying a dangerous form of travel.

Myth: "I had COVID-19 earlier in the year, so I can go ahead with my normal holiday plans."

Reality: [Reinfection with COVID-19](#) is rare, but it has been shown to happen. Even if you already had COVID-19, there is no way to guarantee you won't get it again and spread it to your friends and family at a holiday gathering.

Myth: "I'm young, so getting COVID-19 is no big deal."

Reality: Even young, healthy people can get very sick or die of COVID-19. Young, healthy people can also spread the virus to their higher-risk friends and relatives. It's important to think not only of yourself, but of every person you'll be in contact with this holiday season when assessing the risk of COVID-19.

Myth: "I wear a mask all the time, so there's no way I could spread COVID-19."

Reality: Masks are a helpful tool for reducing the risk of contracting the virus, but they don't completely eliminate that risk. There is no way to ensure zero risk of infection when you enter public places or come into contact with other people. The safest thing to do right now is to stay home. Even if you take all the right precautions, you can't control the behavior of everyone around you.

Myth: "It's better for me to get COVID-19 now, so that we can get herd immunity."

Reality: We may be able to safely achieve herd immunity once a COVID-19 vaccine has been licensed and approved for public use. For now, the risks of getting the virus are simply too high. The best thing to do is to avoid getting COVID-19 by staying home whenever possible.

Additional Resources

- [CDC Holiday Guidance](#)
- [CDPHE Winter Holiday Tips](#)
- [CDPHE Mental Health During The Holidays](#)
- [EPCPH Managing Mental and Emotional Needs During the Holidays](#)