



StrongSchoolsNC

Celebrating Safely: Tips for the Holidays

**Spread love, joy and cheer
this holiday season –
not COVID-19!**

December 4, 2020



**NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**



Dear Families and Staff,

The fall and winter months will offer many of us a chance to rest and reconnect. This holiday season, in the midst of COVID, it will be more important than ever to consider the health and safety of not only ourselves, but of our friends, families and loved ones. And even though this means changes to long-standing holiday traditions for many of us, we must remember that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. With our continued dedication this pandemic can be behind us.

But that will take everyone committing to a safe holiday season and taking action: Reduce the invite list. Space out your tables. Get a COVID test before the event. Or better yet, connect virtually.

I know that North Carolinians are creative and will find amazing ways to celebrate the holidays while still keeping our communities safe. Find a way that works for your family and know that your sacrifice is helping all of us.

We will continue to add to this collection of documents as we create more ways to support one-another across our state. Inside, you'll find best practices for holiday celebrations and private gatherings – if do you choose to come together, please use these documents as a resource and starting-place as you make your plans.

Don't forget the three W's:

- **Wear** a cloth face covering at all times when around other people you do not live with;
- **Wash** your hands with warm water and soap throughout the day and especially after coming in contact with other people; and
- **Wait** 6 feet apart from other people, maintaining at least 6-feet of distance between yourself and people you do not live with at all times.

I wish you all a happy and safe holiday season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E. Cuervo Tilson".

Elizabeth Cuervo Tilson, MD, MPH

State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer
NC Department of Health and Human Services

Celebrate the Holidays Safely

Take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

PRACTICE THE 3 WS



WEAR a mask
over your nose
and mouth



WAIT
6 feet
apart



WASH
your
hands

Avoid holiday travel and limit physical contact with people who do not live with you.

If you choose to travel or gather with people who live outside of your household, follow these recommendations.



Get tested for COVID-19 three to four days before traveling or attending gatherings.



Live together? Sit together.
If not, stay 6 feet apart.



Do not host or attend a gathering if you've been exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms.



Use single-serve options or have one person serve food so that multiple people are not handling items.



Guests who are high risk for complications from COVID-19 should attend events virtually.



Clean and disinfect commonly-touched surfaces such as door handles and sink faucets.



Keep the guest list small.



Host your gathering outdoors.
If that's not possible, make sure the room is well-ventilated by opening windows and doors.



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Interim Guidance for Winter Holidays (November 25, 2020)

Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. This guidance is intended for people celebrating winter holidays.

While the holidays are a time when families and others gather together, you should be careful, particularly if gatherings include [individuals at higher risk](#) for severe illness (e.g., people over the age of 65 or who have underlying health conditions), and if there is an increasing or high number of cases in the community. If you have been recently diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have been around a person with COVID-19, then do not host or participate in any in-person gatherings until you complete your isolation or quarantine period.

Decreasing risk during the holidays:

- The CDC recommends the safest way to celebrate the holidays is to stay at home and only celebrate with the people you live with. Gathering with family or friends who do not live with you can increase the chances of getting or spreading COVID-19 or the flu.
- If you do gather during the holidays, keep the groups small and stay outside, if possible.
- You should practice the 3Ws and wear a face covering, keep 6 feet of social distancing, and wash hands well. The 3Ws are even more important if you are getting together with someone at high risk of complications with COVID-19.
 - Remember that face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with, including visiting someone else's house or when you are having guests over at your own home. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members.

Travel and gathering during the holidays:

If you are traveling and/or are planning to be with family members you do not live with during the holidays, there are steps you should take to reduce the risk of viral spread.

Screening Test

- You should consider having a screening COVID-19 test prior to travel or attending family gatherings. If you do have a screening test, consider the following important information:
 - A negative test only gives you information for that point in time. A negative test does not mean you will remain negative at any time point after that test.
 - Screening tests may miss some infections, particularly if done using rapid or "point of care" tests.
 - Even if you have a negative test, you should wear a mask, physically distance, avoid crowds and indoor crowded places, wash your hands frequently, monitor yourself for symptoms, and minimize contact with people at high risk of complications of COVID-19.

Before the event:

- You should consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.
- Remind invited guests to stay home if they have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days or are showing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, sink handles, bathroom surfaces) before guests come over and between uses.
- Keep the guest list small. When deciding how many people to invite to your gathering, consider the amount of space you have and the ability to maintain social distancing during the event. o Remember that any gathering of more than 10 people indoors or 50 people outdoors is prohibited statewide.
- [Higher risk](#) guests should consider attending events virtually, so they can remain safely at home.
- If higher risk individuals do attend gatherings in person, ensure the 3Ws are practiced by all guests and limit the number of other guests in attendance as much as possible.
- *The day before the event*, all guests should screen for symptoms and stay home if they are not feeling well.
- Remind guests that face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with and outdoors if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance from non-household members.

During the winter holiday event:

- Host your gathering outdoors, when possible. If this is not feasible, make sure the room or space is well-ventilated by opening windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather.
- Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing between guests. People from the same household can be in groups together and do not need to be 6 feet apart – just 6 feet away from other groups or families.
- Practice the 3Ws (Wear, Wait, Wash) during the event: Wear a face covering when not eating or drinking, Wait six feet apart from others, and Wash your hands regularly.
 - Remember that face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with, including visiting someone else's house or when you are having guests over at your own home. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members.
- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible. Have one household approach the food serving area at a time to prevent congregating.
- Consider identifying one person to serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
- Use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salads

Holiday Shopping:

It is **strongly recommended** that individuals do not participate in any traditional holiday shopping where customers gather in large groups waiting for stores to open or are in crowded stores for extended times. It is also recommended that people who are at [high risk](#) for COVID-19 complications (e.g., people over 65 years of age or with underlying chronic conditions) limit in-person shopping if possible. If you have been recently diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have been around a person with COVID-19, do not conduct in-person shopping until you complete your isolation or quarantine period.

Before You Go Shopping:

- Check to see if the store offers online shopping or curbside pick-up that can be used instead of in-person shopping.
- Check to see the store hours and consider going at off-times, so there are fewer people in the store.
- Check to see if the stores offer special hours for people with high risk for severe illness.
- Wear a cloth face mask and bring hand sanitizer with you to the store.

When You Are Out Shopping:

- [Follow the Three Ws](#): Wear a face covering, Wait Six Feet from other people, and Wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer.
 - Remember that face coverings are required inside all retail establishments. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance from non-household members.
- Remember that all retail establishments in North Carolina are required to limit customer occupancy to no more than 50% and have all employees and customers wear face masks.
- Use hand sanitizer before you enter the store and after you exit. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when you return home.
- Have a list of items to buy to limit browsing and do not unnecessarily touch multiple items
- Shop only in stores that have implemented proper safety protocols. Examples include but are not limited to stores that:
 - Sanitize shopping carts between uses
 - Use touchless payment methods
 - Limit occupancy
 - Have social-distancing reminders in-place
- Avoid shopping in stores that attract crowds and make social-distancing difficult. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - Stores with in-person, limited supply sales
 - Stores with in-person events such as tree lightings, Santa Claus visits, etc.
- Avoid shopping with a non-household member.

- If you do shop with a non-household member, remember that face coverings are required around them at all times indoors, including in a vehicle. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members.

For more recommendations on how to safely attend a gathering, please follow the [NCDHHS Guidance for Private Social Gatherings](#) and [Guidelines for Get-Togethers](#) and only engage in the lower or moderate risk activities below.

Lower Risk Activities

- Having a [dinner](#) with only people who live in your household
- Preparing traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and delivering them in a way that doesn't involve contact with others
- Having a virtual dinner and sharing recipes with friends and family
- Watching sports events, parades, and movies from home

Moderate Risk Activities

- Having a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community
 - Follow NCDHHS's [Guidance for Private Gatherings](#)
- Attending a small outdoor sports event with safety precautions in place
- Attending a reverse parade, where spectators remain in their car and drive by floats or performers
- Avoid shopping in stores that attract crowds and make social-distancing difficult

High Risk Activities

Avoid these higher risk activities to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19:

- Attending large indoor gatherings with people from outside of your household or with people who do not practice the 3 W's (wear, wait, and wash)
 - Remember that any gathering of more than 10 people indoors or 50 people outdoors is prohibited statewide
- Attending parades- under the current [Executive Order](#) traditional parades are prohibited mass gatherings and limited in size

Guidelines for Get-Togethers

Any time people get together there is an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. Whether you're hosting or attending an event, here are tips for gathering safely and preventing the spread of the virus.



Should you host or attend? Do not if you're sick, have been diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, are waiting on COVID-19 test results, or have been told to isolate or quarantine by a health care professional or health department.



Keep it distant. Arrange space so people from different households can stay distant (at least 6 feet apart) and plan activities where social distancing can be maintained.



Consider asking all guests to avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the event.



Eating and drinking? Make sure you are 6 feet from others when you take off your mask.



Keep it small. No gathering should be larger than 10 people indoors and 50 people outdoors. Remember, the virus can be spread in smaller gatherings as well.



Limit physical contact. No handshaking or hugs. Wave or verbally greet each other instead.



High-risk for COVID-19 complications? Consider whether you should attend. Practice the 3Ws (Wear, Wait, Wash) at all times, but especially around people who are at high risk for COVID-19 complications.



Wash your hands regularly or use hand sanitizer.



Stay outdoors if you can. If indoors, open windows to increase ventilation with outside air as much as possible.



Avoid self-serve food. Limit the number of people handling or serving food. If serving food, have one person serve all food so that multiple people are not handling serving utensils. Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks. Use disposable utensils and dishes.



Wear a mask. Everyone should wear one over their nose and mouth.



Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as door handles, sink handles, and bathroom surfaces.



Interim Guidance for Private Social Gatherings (November 12, 2020)

Guidelines for Private Social Gatherings: Any scenario in which people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. This includes private social gatherings in North Carolina such as cookouts or holiday gatherings. This guidance is intended for hosts and guests of private gatherings. The guidance below will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in communities.

The Basics

- Do not host or attend a gathering if:
 - You have been diagnosed with COVID-19
 - You are waiting for COVID-19 test results
 - You are experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19
 - You have been told by the local health department to quarantine or isolate, or
 - You may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19
- No gathering should exceed current Mass Gathering Limits (10 people indoors and 50 people outdoors). Gatherings above these limits are currently prohibited statewide to slow the spread of COVID-19. However, the virus can be spread in smaller gatherings as well.
- When deciding how many people to invite to your gathering, consider the amount of space you have and the ability to maintain social distancing during the event.
- People at high risk of complications for COVID-19 (e.g., people over 65 years of age or with underlying chronic conditions) should avoid social gatherings. If they do attend, ensure the 3Ws are practiced.
- Consider hosting virtual events or having a virtual option for individuals that are higher risk to join safely from their home.
- Outdoor activities are preferred over indoor because it is easier to stay apart and there is more wind and air to help reduce the spread of the virus. However, even in outdoor settings, the more people that interact increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Practice the [3 Ws \(Wear, Wait, Wash\)](#) during the event: Wear a face covering, Wait six feet apart from others, and Wash your hands regularly.
- Anyone who develops COVID-19 within 48 hours after attending a gathering should notify other attendees as soon as possible regarding the potential exposure.

Hosting a Social Gathering

Remind guests to stay home if they are sick

- Remind invited guests to stay home if they have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#).
- Consider keeping a list of guests who attended for potential future [contract tracing](#) needs. Encourage guests to download the [SlowCOVIDNC](#) Exposure Notification App.
- Tell your guests what steps you are taking to make sure your gathering is as safe as possible.

Encourage social distancing

- Host your gathering outdoors, when possible. If this is not feasible, make sure the room or space is well-ventilated by opening windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather.
- Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing. People from the same household can be in groups together and do not need to be 6 feet apart – just 6 feet away from other groups or families.
- If planning activities for adults and/or kids, consider those where social distancing can be maintained, like sidewalk chalk art, corn hole, or frisbee.
- When guests arrive, minimize gestures that promote close contact. For example, rather than shaking hands or giving hugs, wave and verbally greet guests.
- Be mindful of serving alcohol, as guests are less likely to follow social distancing practices when drinking.

Wear cloth face coverings

- Wear [cloth face coverings](#) when less than 6 feet apart from people or indoors.
- Consider providing cloth face coverings for guests or asking them to bring their own.

Clean hands often

- Consider providing hand sanitizer in addition to clearly marked hand washing areas.
- [Wash your hands](#) for at least 20 seconds when entering and exiting social gatherings. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Make sure there is adequate soap or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, paper towels, and tissues available in the restrooms and encourage guests not to form a line at the door. Consider also providing cleaning supplies that allow guests to wipe down surfaces before they leave. Remove shared/communal hand towels.
- Remind guests to wash their hands before serving or eating food.
- Use single-use hand towels or paper towels for drying hands so guests do not share a towel.

Limit the number of people handling or serving food

- Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks.
- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible. Have one household approach the food serving area at a time to prevent congregating.
- If serving any food, consider identifying one person to serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
Use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, and condiments, so that multiple people are not handling the items.

Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items

- [Clean and disinfect](#) commonly touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, sink handles, bathroom surfaces) before guests come over and between uses.
- Clean and disinfect any shared items between use when feasible.
- Use touchless garbage cans or pails or take lids off garbage cans to decrease the number of items touched.
- Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. [Wash your hands](#) after removing gloves.
- If you choose to use any shared items that are reusable (e.g., seating covers, tablecloths, linen napkins), wash, clean, and sanitize them after the event.

Attending a Social Gathering

Prepare before you go

- Stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, if you are waiting for COVID-19 test results, are experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, been told by the local health department to quarantine or isolate, or think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
 - Invited guests who live with [those at higher risk](#) should also consider the potential risk to their loved ones or others who live in their household.
- Check with the host for updated information about any COVID-19 safety guidelines and if they [have steps in place](#) to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Prioritize attending outdoor activities over indoor activities and stay within your local area as much as possible.
- Bring supplies to help you and others stay healthy—for example, [cloth face coverings](#) (bring extra), hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, and drinking water.
- If you are planning to attend in-person holiday gatherings with people outside of your household, consider strictly avoiding contact with people outside of your household for 14 days before the gathering.
- Get your flu shot prior to visiting friends and family during the flu season. Flu season begins in October and often peaks in the winter months, so the time to get your flu shot is now. Allow about 2 weeks for the flu shot to be active in protection.

Use social distancing and limit physical contact

- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet or more from people who do not live in your household. Be particularly mindful in areas where it may be harder to keep this distance, such as parking areas and routes of entry and exit.
- Select seating or determine where to stand based on the ability to keep 6 feet of space from people who do not live in your household, including if you will be eating or drinking.
- Arrive to the gatherings early or at off-peak times to avoid crowding and congested areas.
- Avoid forming a line at the restroom door or using the restroom at high traffic times, such as at the end of the gathering.
- Be mindful of drinking alcohol, as this can impact your ability to follow social distancing practices.

Wear cloth face coverings

- Wear a [cloth face covering](#) when interacting with other people to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.
- Wearing cloth face coverings is most important when social distancing is difficult.
 - Cloth face coverings are strongly encouraged in settings where individuals might raise their voices, such as shouting, chanting, or singing. These are activities that increase the release of respiratory droplets and fine aerosols into the air and pose higher risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- If guests need to remove a face covering to eat or drink, it is recommended they maintain 6 feet distance from people outside their household and put their face coverings back on after they are done eating or drinking.

Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items

- Use paper towels instead of a communal/shared hand towel. Use touchless garbage cans or pails.
- Use cashless payment options when possible.
- Avoid any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets and condiment or drink stations.
- Use disposable food service items including utensils and dishes, if available, or consider bringing your own dishes and utensils.
- [Wash your hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer immediately before eating food or after touching any common surfaces like door handles and toilets

Considerations for higher-risk individuals

- People at high risk of complications for COVID-19 should avoid social gatherings.
 - High risk individuals include people over the age of 65 or have certain [medical conditions](#).
- Higher risk guests should consider attending events virtually, so they can remain safely at home.
- If higher risk individuals do attend gatherings in person, ensure the 3Ws are practiced by all guests and limit the number of other guests in attendance as much as possible.
- Consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.