Interim Guidance for Winter Holiday Gatherings
(December 14, 2021)

North Carolina is experiencing another rise in COVID-19 cases due to the highly contagious Delta variant, primarily in people who are not vaccinated. In addition, a new variant, Omicron, has emerged globally that appears to be even more contagious. Safe and tested COVID-19 vaccines reduce the chances of getting COVID-19 and provide significant protection from serious illness, hospitalization, and death. With the holidays approaching and people gathering, take actions to protect yourself and your family and friends.

This Winter and Holiday Season

- **Vaccinate:** Before gathering, attending events, or traveling, get a COVID-19 vaccine. If you’ve been vaccinated, get your booster as soon as you are eligible. And don’t forget to layer protection with a flu shot.
- **Test:** Get a COVID-19 test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household and before and after traveling, regardless of your vaccine status.
- **Mask:** Wear a mask indoors in public, even if you are vaccinated.

**Holiday Travel**

To protect yourself and others, delay your travel plans and stay home until you are fully vaccinated — two weeks after your second shot for Pfizer or Moderna or after the one-dose Johnson & Johnson shot.

- If you do travel and are NOT fully vaccinated, get tested 1-3 days before and 3-5 days after travel AND stay home and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel, even if you test negative.

**Gathering During the Holidays**

Attending outdoor or virtual events presents a lower risk for spreading COVID-19 than events that are in-person and indoors. Consider avoiding large in-person social gatherings.

If you do gather:

- Get vaccinated, including a [COVID-19 booster](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster.html) when eligible and a flu shot. NCDHHS strongly recommends that hosts direct their guests and family members to [Find Your Spot, Take Your Shot](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster.html) and encourage them to get vaccinated before the event.
  - For guidance on vaccinations, please refer to our [Interim Guidance for Individuals Who Have Been Vaccinated Against COVID-19](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/pshs) and [Recommendations for Protecting Each Other](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster.html).

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- COVID-19 vaccines can be administered at the same time as other vaccines, including the flu vaccine.

- Get tested before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household.
- Guests who are not fully vaccinated should wear a face covering and maintain physical distance from others, especially when they are indoors.
- Guests who are fully vaccinated should also wear a mask in all indoor public spaces if the gathering is in a county with high or substantial levels of transmission, as defined by the CDC.
- Host gathering outdoors, when possible.
  - If gathering indoors, use a space that is large enough to allow for physical distancing and consider limiting the number of attendees.
  - Increase circulation of outdoor air by opening windows and doors. For more information see, CDC’s guidance on Improving Ventilation in Your Home.
- Everyone, regardless of vaccine status, should get tested before gathering.
  - For information on self-testing, see CDC’s Self Testing guidance.
  - If you are sick or have symptoms, do not host or attend a gathering. Get tested.
- For tips on general food safety, follow CDC’s guidance for Food Safety for the Holidays.

For safer holiday celebrations consider:
- Enjoying meals with individuals in your household only.
- Practicing religious holiday customs at home.
- Preparing and delivering a meal to a neighbor.
- Watching religious and cultural performances virtually or outdoors.
- Attending religious ceremonies or holiday events virtually or outdoors.

Organizers of holiday-related events should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission at their events. For specific action items and recommendations, please refer to our Events and Festivals guidance.

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.