



Interim Guidance for Winter Holidays (December 14, 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 risks 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 during the holidays with family members you do not live with, 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 and after travel or attending family gatherings. Get tested 1-3 days before your flight. Get tested 3-5 days after travel AND stay home for 7 days after travel.
 - Even if you test negative, stay home for the full 7 days.
 - If you don't get tested, it's safest to stay home for 10 days after travel.
- If you do have a screening test, also 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.

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- 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 up to 14 days (refer to quarantine requirements based on most recent [CDC quarantine guidance](#)) before the gathering.
- Remind invited guests they should [quarantine as per CDC guidance](#) 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.
 - 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 member 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 salad dressings, food containers, and condiments, so that multiple people are not handling the items.

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 holiday movies, parades, or sports events from home with members of your household
- Hosting a virtual party such as "ugly" holiday sweater contest, gift exchanges, holiday singalong, or gingerbread making competition
- Decorating your house, apartment, or living space
- Building a snowman with members of your household
- Baking holiday foods with members of your household
- Driving or walking around your community with members of your household to look at decorations
- Making holiday crafts, cards or cookies to send or deliver to family, friends, and neighbors in a way that does not involve contact with others, such as leaving them at the door

Moderate Risk Activities

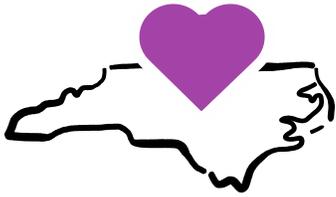
- Having a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community
 - Follow NCDHHS's [Guidance for Private Social Gatherings](#)
- Attending a small outdoor sports event with safety precautions in place
- Attending a reverse parade, where spectators remain in their car and drive by floats or performers
- Visiting Santa Claus outdoors with masks on and staying 6ft apart

Higher 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 Ws (wear, wait, and wash)
 - Remember that any gathering of more than 10 people indoors or 50 people outdoors is prohibited statewide

- Also remember that the risk of spreading COVID increases with activities such as singing or caroling
- Attending parades or festivals- under the current [Executive Order](#) traditional parades and festivals with more than 50 people are prohibited mass gatherings and limited in size
- Shopping in stores that attract crowds can make social-distancing difficult. Consider utilizing curbside pickup or online shopping options



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**Staying apart brings us together.
Protect your family and neighbors.**

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.



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