



News release:

For immediate release:

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Pandemic Holiday Safety Tips

Billings, MT – Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s spell celebrations with families and friends, but the seriousness of COVID-19 requires all of us to take precautions to minimize risk.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all Americans stay home for Thanksgiving 2020 and celebrate in-person only with members of their household.

RiverStone Health, Yellowstone County’s public health agency, asks everyone to do their part to minimize the risk of spreading the virus through holiday activities. Here are some safer and more risky ways of celebrating holiday traditions.

Ways to safely celebrate winter holidays:

- Celebrate at home with members of your household.
- Participate in online church or religious gatherings.
- Use video chats to visit with family and friends or host an online party.
- Have a virtual dinner and share recipes.
- Prepare traditional recipes for your family and those at high risk of severe illness, delivering them in a way that doesn’t involve contact with others.
- Prepare a holiday meal or bake traditional treats for household members.
- Watch sports, parades or holiday movies at home.
- Decorate your home or yard.
- Shop with local stores through online and phone orders. Many local businesses offer curbside pickup and deliveries.
- Order takeout from local restaurants for special meals. Use drive-through and food delivery services.
- Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

Less safe ways to celebrate the holidays include:

- Traveling to visit relatives or friends, which increases your chances of getting and spreading the virus.
- Attending or hosting large indoor gatherings or crowded parties.
- Attending events that bring people close together or involve singing or loud talking.
- Parties with alcohol or drugs that may cloud judgment and increase risky behaviors.

Ways to lessen the risks:

- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and avoid sharing items.
- Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks, instead of providing self-serve or potluck-style options.
- Limit people going in and out of kitchens or other food preparation areas.
- Wear a mask while preparing or serving food for guests.
- Use disposable plates, utensils and condiments.
- Avoid hugging and other gestures that promote close contact.
- Indoor gatherings generally are riskier than outdoor gatherings. Since poor ventilation contributes to risk, consider opening windows or doors, if feasible.
- Longer gatherings and larger gatherings pose added risk. **All gatherings in Yellowstone County are currently limited in size to 25 people.**
- Community levels of COVID-19 are high, which increase risk. Check [covid.riverstonehealth.org](https://www.covid.riverstonehealth.org) for the latest information on community spread.
- Gatherings with guests from different places pose a higher risk than gatherings with guests who live in the same area, especially if those guests are traveling from areas with higher rates of infection.
- The behavior of guests before the gathering may increase risk, if those guests fail to take preventive measures such as mask-wearing, physical-distancing and hand-washing.
- People who are sick, have symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to COVID-19 should **not** host or attend gatherings.
- If you are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or live or work with someone at increased risk of severe illness, you should avoid gatherings with people who do not live in your household.

Travel during the holidays:

- Making short trips by car with members of your household, with no stops along the way, is considered safer than longer trips. Making stops can put you in close contact with others and with frequently touched surfaces. Traveling long distances with people who are not members of your household also poses additional risks.
- The CDC strongly recommends passengers traveling on public transportation, such as planes, buses, and trains, wear masks covering both the mouth and nose. The CDC also recommends wearing those masks while waiting in terminals or stations.
- Most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on airplane flights because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes, according to the CDC. But keeping your distance is difficult on crowded flights and may increase your risk.
- Travel on flights with layovers, and travel by cruise ship or river boat, are considered highest risk.

Protection against COVID-19 depends on each of us: Keep your distance; wash your hands; wear a mask in public indoor, school and workplace spaces; avoid large gatherings; and stay home if you are ill. Get your flu vaccine. Holiday gatherings can contribute to the spread of many infectious diseases.

You can find more tips for safer holidays online at CDC.gov

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

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