Guidance for Holiday Celebrations

Winter holidays such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year's will have to be different this year to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It is essential to avoid activities that pose or present a higher risk for spread. This holiday season, modify your holiday plans to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to keep your family, friends, families, and communities healthy and safe.

Winter Holidays

Traditionally, winter holidays are times when many families travel long distances to celebrate together. Unfortunately, **travel** increases the chance of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. If you must travel, be informed of the risks involved.

As cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to increase across the United States, the safest way to celebrate the winter holidays is to celebrate at home with the people you live with.

Gatherings with family and friends who do not live with you should be avoided, as they can increase the risks of getting and spreading COVID-19.

Considerations for Small Gatherings of Family and Friends

Celebrating virtually or with members of your own household (who are consistently taking measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19) poses the lowest risk for spread. People who do not currently live in your housing unit, such as college students who are returning home from school for the holidays, are considered part of different households. In-person gatherings that bring together family members or friends from different households, including college students returning home, pose higher levels of risk.

Several factors can contribute to the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 at in-person gatherings. In combination, these factors will create various amounts of risk:

- **County levels of COVID-19** – High or increasing levels of COVID-19 cases in the gathering location, as well as in the areas where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees. Information on the number of cases in an area can be found on kycovid19.ky.gov, Kentucky's COVID-19 dashboard and often be found on the local health department websites.
- **Exposure during travel** – Airports, bus stations, train stations, public transport, gas stations, and rest stops are all places travelers can be exposed to the virus in the air and on surfaces.
- **Location of the gathering** – Indoor gatherings, especially those with poor ventilation (for example, smaller enclosed spaces with no outside air), pose more risk than outdoor gatherings.
- **Duration of the gathering** – Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter gatherings. Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more greatly increases the risk of becoming sick and requires quarantine.

- **Number and crowding of people at the gathering** – Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. Kentucky has specific recommendations on the size of the gatherings which limits private social gatherings to eight from a maximum of two households.
- **Behaviors of attendees** *prior to the gathering* – Individuals who did not consistently adhere to social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart), mask wearing, handwashing, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk than those who consistently practice these safety measures.
- **Behaviors of attendees** *during the gathering* – Gatherings with more safety measures in place, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and handwashing, pose less risk than gatherings where fewer or no preventive measures are being implemented. Use of alcohol or drugs may alter judgment and make it more difficult to practice COVID-19 safety measures.

The following people should not attend in-person holiday gatherings

People with or exposed to COVID-19
Do not host or participate in any in-person gatherings if you or anyone in your household, or if any of the invited attendees:

- Have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and not met the criteria for when it is safe to be around others
- Have symptoms of COVID-19
- Are waiting for COVID-19 viral test results
- May have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19

People at increased risk for severe illness
If you are an older adult or person with certain medical conditions who is at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or live or work with someone at increased risk of severe illness, you should avoid in-person gatherings with people who do not live in your household.

Considerations if Attending a Gathering

Organizers and attendees of larger events should consider the risk of virus spread based on event size (number of attendees and other factors) and take steps to reduce the possibility of infection, as outlined in the Considerations for Events and Gatherings.

Ensure proper ventilation and air flow if spending time in doors. If you are able, consider opening the windows.

The more prevention measures that you put in place, the safer your gathering will be. No single measure is enough to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Travel and Overnight Stays

The safest thing to do is to stay home and travel is discouraged. If you do decide to travel, testing can help you do so more safely. Testing does not eliminate all risk, but it can help make travel safer.

If you decide to travel, follow these safety measures during your trip to protect yourself and others from COVID-19:

- Always wear a mask in public settings or anywhere when you are in places with people with whom you do not usually live.

- Avoid close contact by staying at least 6 feet apart (about 2 arm lengths) from anyone who does not live in your household.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Avoid contact with anyone who is sick.
- Avoid touching your face mask, eyes, nose, and mouth.

Travel can increase the chance of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Use information from the following resources to decide whether to travel during the holidays:

- Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Know Your Travel Risk
- Know When to Delay Your Travel to Avoid Spreading COVID-19
- Considerations for traveling overnight
- Travel Planner
- Kentucky Travel Advisory

Considerations for staying overnight or hosting overnight guests

Household exposures are among the highest risk settings to spread COVID-19. Consider whether you, someone you live with, or anyone you plan to visit, is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, before deciding to stay overnight in someone else's home. This also applies to college students who travel to visit family or friends. For longer visits, have students or other guests follow steps to protect themselves and others and use **Kentucky guidance** for quarantine to determine when the student or guest, if without symptoms or recent contacts with anyone with COVID-19, can be considered a household member.

Hosts and guests should have a plan for what to do if someone becomes sick.

Steps to take if exposed to COVID-19 during a holiday gathering

If you are exposed to COVID-19 at a holiday gathering, while traveling, or at any time, quarantine yourself to protect others by following the **Kentucky guidelines** for quarantine on the kycovid19.ky.gov website.

If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 *within 14 days of the event or celebration*, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, or if you test positive for COVID-19, immediately notify the host and others who attended. Follow the public health recommendations for community-related exposure and inform other attendees about their possible exposure to the virus. Contact your health care provider and follow the CDC-recommended steps for what to do if you become sick.