

COVID-19 Guidance for Holiday Events and Gatherings

Fall and winter celebrations, such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Halloween, Día de los Muertos, Navratri, Diwali, Thanksgiving, Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and New Year's, typically include large gatherings of families and friends, crowded parties, and travel that may put people at increased risk for COVID-19.

A safe holiday may look and feel a little different this year as people evaluate the risks posed by COVID-19 and decide how they will celebrate. Some people may be ready to get together with friends at a local restaurant and some may be more comfortable staying home with holiday movies and a restaurant food delivery. Sacramento County Public Health would like to share information on how to take part in this holiday while reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Background

On June 15, 2021, California reopened the economy and lifted restrictions on almost all businesses and activities. However, COVID-19 is still causing illness and hospitalizations in Sacramento County. Variants of COVID-19 continue to pose a significant risk. [Vaccinations](#), sanitation measures and [face masks](#) have helped reduce the spread of COVID-19, but everyone needs to remain vigilant.

[COVID-19](#) is a respiratory illness that is usually spread through the air via respiratory droplets from an infected person. The virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to others by infected persons who have few or no symptoms. The basic [COVID-19 prevention measures](#) are still important for helping reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash hands often, and use hand sanitizer when hand washing is not an option
- Stay home when sick
- Wear a face mask
- Clean and disinfect high contact surfaces often

Please Note: [In Sacramento County, masks are required to be worn in all indoor public settings regardless of vaccination status.](#)

In addition, the California Department of Public Health updated the [Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings](#) which requires masks be worn in all indoor public settings **statewide**, regardless of vaccine status. The State guidance is effective from **December 15, 2021 through January 15, 2022** when it will be re-evaluated.

Many options: Evaluate your risk, choose what's best for your family

There are many activities that people enjoy during the holidays, such as shopping, dining out, craft fairs, holiday entertainment, holiday light displays, and gatherings of friends and family. If you have a family member that is unvaccinated or at high risk for getting severely ill from COVID-19, you might

consider choosing low risk activities and skipping some events all together. If your family decides to participate, please remember to follow basic COVID-19 prevention measures.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends thinking about [Safer Ways to Celebrate the Holidays](#):

- Protect those not yet eligible for vaccination such as young children by getting yourself and other eligible people around them vaccinated.
- Wear well-fitting masks over your nose and mouth if you are in public indoor settings if you are not fully vaccinated.
 - Even those who are fully vaccinated should wear a mask in public indoor settings in communities with substantial to high transmission.
 - Outdoors is safer than indoors.
 - Avoid crowded, poorly ventilated spaces.
 - If you are sick or have symptoms, don't host or attend a gathering.
 - Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have a close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Recommendations for high risk or unvaccinated individuals

The following factors should be considered when deciding to participate in any activity:

1. **Large Crowds** - It is more difficult to maintain 6 ft separation if there are a large number of people. Even with limited capacity, some retailers and events may be crowded.
2. **Face Coverings** - If people are not consistently wearing face coverings, you may choose to leave and return another time.
3. **Outdoor Activity** - Air circulation is always better outdoors which can reduce the possibility of transmission. Choose outdoor activities whenever possible.
4. **Health Risk** - If you or one of your family members or friends is unvaccinated and/or at higher risk for COVID-19 complications, then avoid gatherings.
5. **Not Feeling Well** - If you, a family member or friend feels a bit "off" (tired or has a headache), reschedule your plans. You are protecting the health of others by not participating.
6. **Low, Medium and High-Risk Activities** – Many traditional holiday activities can be high-risk for spreading viruses such as parties and travel. When planning holiday activities this year, consider safer, lower risk alternatives.

Gatherings

Keeping our family and friends safe is especially important during the holiday season. If you plan to host a gathering, you might consider asking that the people you invite to attend only if they are vaccinated or have had a negative COVID-19 test within the previous 24-48 hours. (24 hours for antigen test and 48 hours for a PCR test)

Do not host or participate in any in-person gatherings, if you or anyone in your household:

- Has tested positive for COVID-19 and has [not met the criteria for when it is safe to be around others](#)
- Has [symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- Is waiting for COVID-19 viral test results
- May have been [exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days](#)
- Is at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19

Tips for Hosting a Holiday Gathering

When hosting gatherings, please consider these recommendations:

- Set up outdoor areas for people to enjoy. Use porches, yards, driveways and pop-up tents as outdoor entertaining spaces. In any indoor spaces, keep windows open to increase ventilation.
- Consider keeping holiday gatherings on the smaller side and limiting invitations to family and/or close friends.
- Use email, texts or phone calls to let people attending know what you expect. You might encourage wearing face coverings at your gathering, or let people know to bundle up since you will have outdoor seating areas. Also, remind everyone to keep each other safe and stay home if they are not feeling well.
- Have extra face coverings available for guests, keep hand sanitizer in prominent locations throughout your home.
- Keep handwashing sinks readily available with soap and consider providing paper towels instead of a multi-use cloth towel.

Tips for Grocery Shopping

Holiday celebrations wouldn't be complete without food and grocery stores will be busy during the holidays.

- Make your grocery list and plan to shop at least a few days before the holiday.
- Shop earlier in the day (before 10am) or late in the evening (after 7:30pm).
- Consider ordering groceries online and using contactless curbside pick-up.

Tips for Attending a Holiday Gathering

Below are some additional considerations for attending an in-person holiday gathering:

- Be fully vaccinated prior to attending a gathering.
- Wear a mask if you are not fully vaccinated.
- Do not travel or attend the gathering if you have had a positive COVID test or COVID-like symptoms in the 10 days prior to travel or gathering.
- Bring hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- If you are a person who traveled recently or might be coming from a higher risk environment (college dorms, healthcare), please consider limiting your interactions with people who are high-risk or who care for high-risk people.
- If you or a family member or friend feels a bit "off" (does not feel well, feels tired or has a headache), reschedule your plans.

Tips for Food and Drinks at Holiday Gatherings

Currently, there is no evidence that handling food or eating is associated with directly spreading COVID-19. Contracting COVID-19 by touching a surface or object is low risk, but food, food packaging, and utensils should be handled with caution.

- Encourage everyone to wash their hands before and after preparing, serving, and eating food.
- Keep hand sanitizer readily available.
- Instead of buffet style self-service of food, consider having one person serve all the food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled.
- Wear a face covering while preparing or serving food to others who don't live in your household.

- Consider using disposable, food containers, cups, plates and utensils.
- If you choose to use any items that are reusable (e.g., seating covers, tablecloths, linen napkins), wash and disinfect them after the event.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between uses when feasible. Use [EPA-approved disinfectants](#).
- Use touchless garbage cans if available. Wash hands after removing removing trash.

After the Gathering

If you participated in higher risk activities or think that you may have been exposed to COVID-19 during a gathering, take extra precautions for 14 days after the event to protect others:

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Avoid being around people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Consider getting [tested for COVID-19](#).

If you are waiting for your COVID-19 test results, stay home until you have a result, and follow [CDC's 3 Key Steps](#) to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

If you develop [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#), such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, or if you test positive for COVID-19, immediately contact the host and others that attended the event or celebration that you attended. They may need to 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](#), and follow the [public health recommendations for community-related exposure](#).

Holiday travel

Travel can increase the risk for exposure to COVID-19, particularly travel through shared conveyance such as air, bus or rail travel.

The California Department of Public Health issued a travel advisory on December 13, 2021. The [CDPH Travel Advisory](#) recommends:

- All travelers arriving in or returning to California from other states or countries should follow [CDC travel guidance](#).
- All travelers arriving in or returning to California from other states or countries should take a COVID-19 test 3-5 days after arrival.
- All travelers who test positive or develop [symptoms of COVID-19](#) should [isolate](#) and follow [public health recommendations](#).

Use information from the following webpages to decide whether to travel during the holidays:

- [CDC Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [CDC Travel Tips for Families with Unvaccinated Children](#)
- [CDC Travel Recommendations by Destination](#)

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

- Wear a face covering over your nose and mouth when in public places and public transit.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer.
- Try to avoid contact with anyone who is sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Get the flu vaccine.

- If flying, be prepared by checking out the Sacramento International Airport COVID-19 FAQ webpage; <https://sacramento.aero/smf/about/passenger-services/covid-19>.

Holiday Events

Many organizations host a variety of holiday events. If you plan to attend a holiday event, please remember to:

- Wear a face covering when indoors or at crowded outdoor events.
- Stay home if you are sick or don't feel well.

Mega Events

Mega Events are defined as events drawing crowds greater than 1,000 (indoors) and 10,000 (outdoors) attendees. CDPH has issues guidelines for Mega Events. For further information, please see the [CDPH Beyond the Blueprint Guidance for Mega Events](#).

Holiday Shopping

Many people will be shopping for gifts this holiday season. When shopping, consider alternatives to avoid crowds. Many retailers offer curbside pick-up, online shopping and early morning hours. Shopping mid-week, early in the morning or later in the evening is often less crowded. Always wear a face covering and avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Use hand sanitizer and wash hands often.

Holiday Photos

It's always a great idea to take photos outside! Late afternoon lighting is incredible by the river in Old Sacramento. The Capitol and the many parks throughout Sacramento also make great backgrounds.

If you plan to take photos with Santa, be prepared and plan ahead. Malls are making special preparations for a safe visit with Santa. Visits and photos with Santa may require making a reservation and wearing a face covering.

Retail outlets and other facilities where Santa Claus will be appearing should consider implementing the following measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission this holiday season.

- Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, elves, and all of Santa's helpers should be vaccinated or provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test (weekly testing during the weeks that Santa's Workshop is open)
- Advise all staff and patrons to stay home if experiencing any symptoms of illness
- Under the Sacramento County Health Order, face coverings are required in all indoor public spaces and workplaces
- Move Santa's Workshop outdoors where risks of COVID-19 transmission are significantly lower than indoors
- Position Santa and visitors so they are able to maintain physical distancing of 6 feet or greater throughout their interaction

Viewing Holiday Displays

Driving and walking through the local neighborhoods to look at holiday lights and displays can be a fun way to get out and feel the holiday spirit. If you do visit an area where many people are clustered

together, consider wearing a face covering and try to maintain 6 ft. social distancing from other households.

Holiday Gathering Suggestions and Alternatives

Be creative with new and different ways to celebrate the holidays:

- Greet your friends and family in a way that does not involve close contact. Try an 'air hug' or elbow bump.
- Prepare traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and deliver it to them.
- Have a virtual dinner and share recipes with friends and family.
- Shop online, rather than in person.
- Watch sports events, parades, and movies from home.
- Visit pumpkin patches, tree farms or orchards where COVID-19 safety measures are being followed.
- Participate in touchless holiday experiences
 - Virtual visits and calls with holiday figures
 - Virtual games and trivia
 - Check in with family and friends through texts, phone calls, or video

Resources

[CDC Holiday Celebrations](#)

[Sacramento County COVID-19 Updates](#)

[Sacramento County COVID-19 Vaccination](#)

[State of California Guidance for Mega Events](#)

[CDPH Travel Advisory](#)

Document was prepared by Sacramento County's [Environmental Management Department](#)

Summary of Revisions

11/13/2020: Initial version

10/20/2021: Updated for 2021

12/21/21: Added statewide mask requirement and CDPH Travel Advisory

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