

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 during the COVID-19 pandemic may look and feel a little different this year as people decide how they will celebrate – whether it's getting together with friends at a local restaurant or 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

COVID-19, also known as the novel coronavirus, is a respiratory illness that is spread through the air via respiratory droplets from an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces. The virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to others by infected persons who have few or no symptoms.

Preventing the transmission of COVID-19 requires a combination of prevention measures including: physical distancing, wearing face coverings, sanitizing surfaces, and staying home when not feeling well. ***PLEASE NOTE: Physical distancing alone is insufficient to prevent transmission of COVID-19.***

Requirements may change. Please visit [EMD.SacCounty.net](https://www.emd.sacounty.net) regularly for updates.

The Basics

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. The State of California and the County of Sacramento have limitations on gatherings and business activities, and it is strongly recommend that everyone integrate COVID-19 safety measures into their holiday plans.

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

- 1. Avoid 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. Wear 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. Increased Health Risk** - If you or one of your family members or friends is 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

On November 13, 2020, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued [guidance for private gatherings](#).

While Sacramento County is in the purple tier, all gatherings must take place outdoors and be limited to 3 households or less. People who choose to attend gatherings should adhere to the CDPH guidance as well as take other precautionary measures as outlined in the guidance.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Guidance-for-the-Prevention-of-COVID-19-Transmission-for-Gatherings-November-2020.aspx>

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

- Has been diagnosed with 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

CDPH has stated that private gatherings must be limited to **no more than three households**.
[CDPH Guidance for Private Gatherings](#)

When hosting gatherings, please follow these recommendations:

- Host [outdoor activities](#) rather than indoor activities. 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.
- Limit your invitations to people from your local area as much as possible.
- Limit the people you see to those who you have already been socializing with (your social bubble).
- 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 be entertaining outside. Also, remind everyone to keep each other safe and stay home if not feeling well.
- Have extra face coverings available for guests, keep hand sanitizer in prominent locations throughout your home, and have boxes of tissue readily available.
- Keep handwashing sinks readily available with soap and consider providing paper towels instead of a multi-use cloth towel.
- Provide separate gathering areas so that households can maintain 6ft of distance from other households.
- Limit the length of time you host the gathering. Lengthy gatherings can increase the potential for COVID-19 exposure. CDPH recommends keeping gatherings less than 2 hours.

Tips for Attending a Holiday Gathering

If you will be attending a celebration that someone else is hosting, follow [CDC Considerations for attending an event or gathering](#). Below are some additional considerations for attending an in-person holiday gathering:

- Wear a face covering whenever you are not eating or drinking.
- Bring hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- If you and/or your family are planning to attend in-person holiday gatherings with people outside of your household, consider limiting contact with people outside of your household for 14 days before the gathering.
- Do not travel or attend the gathering if you have had COVID-like symptoms in the 10 days prior to travel or gathering.
- 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 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.
- Try to maintain 6 ft. social distancing while shopping.

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. However, it is possible to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, including food, food packaging, or utensils that have the virus on it and then touching the mouth, nose, or possibly eyes.

- 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. Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. Wash hands after removing gloves.

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

The incidence of COVID-19 is increasing in many states and countries. Persons arriving in California from other states or Californians returning from other states or countries could increase the risk of COVID-19 spread. In addition, travel itself can be a risk for exposure to COVID-19, particularly travel through shared conveyance such as air, bus or rail travel.

Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Use information from the following webpages to decide whether to travel during the holidays:

- [CDC Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [CDC Know Your Travel Risk](#)
- [CDC Know When to Delay Your Travel to Avoid Spreading COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Travel Recommendations by Destination](#)
- [CDPH Travel Advisory, 11/13/2020](#)

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.
- Practice 6 ft. social distancing from anyone who is not from your household.
- 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>. A link to each airline can also be found in the FAQ section under ["What should I expect when I fly?"](#).
- Persons arriving in California from other states or countries, including returning California residents, should practice [self-quarantine](#) for 14 days after arrival. These persons should limit their interactions to their immediate household. This recommendation does not apply to individuals who cross state or country borders for essential travel.

Holiday Events

Many organizations host a variety of holiday events. If you are part of an organization that is planning a holiday event, please complete the [COVID-19 Event/Gathering Application](#). The application will be reviewed to ensure that the event will be in compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols.

Please refer to the [Sacramento County COVID-19 Guidance for Special Events and Gatherings](#).

If you plan to attend a holiday event, please remember to:

- Wear a face covering
- Maintain 6 ft. of social distance from people not in your household
- Stay home if you are sick
- Leave the event if COVID-19 safety protocols are not being followed

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 will require a making a reservation and wearing a face covering. Santa photos can also be done virtually on several different websites.

Viewing Holiday Displays

Driving through the local neighborhoods to look at holiday lights and displays can be a fun way to get out and feel the holiday spirit. In previous years some popular areas had roads blocked off so that people could walk through the neighborhood. To help prevent the risks associated with crowds and gathering, try to visit areas where you can stay in your car and drive through. If you do visit an area where walking is required, ensure that your household wears a face covering and maintains 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 a big smile and an enthusiastic "I'm not touching you, but I am so glad to see you!"
- Have a small dinner with only people who live in your household or community.
- Prepare traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and deliver them in a way that doesn't involve close contact.
- Have a virtual dinner and share recipes with friends and family.
- Shop online, rather than in person, after Thanksgiving.
- Watch sports events, parades, and movies from home.
- Visit pumpkin patches, tree farms or orchards where COVID-19 safety measures such as, frequent hand sanitizing, wearing of face coverings, and social distancing are being followed.
- Participate in touchless holiday experiences
 - Virtual visits and calls with holiday figures

- Virtual games and trivia
- Checking in with family and friends through texts, phone calls, or video

Activities to Avoid

Avoid these higher risk activities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Shopping in crowded stores, especially during Thanksgiving weekend or the weekend before Christmas.
- Participating or being a spectator at a crowded sporting event or other gathering.
- Attending crowded holiday events.
- Using alcohol or drugs, which can cloud judgement and increase risky behaviors.
- Attending large indoor or outdoor gatherings with people from outside of your household.

Resources

[Center for Disease Control: Events and Gatherings](#)

[Sacramento County COVID-19 Updates](#)

[CDPH Guidance for Private Gatherings](#)

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

Summary of Revisions

11/13/2020: Initial version

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