



How to Ring in Holiday Cheer and Stay Safe

The COVID-19 pandemic has left many people feeling stressed and isolated. Upcoming holiday gatherings can be a way for loved ones to reconnect. This holiday season, consider ways you can adjust your plans to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to protect your family and friends. Atrium Health has provided the following tips on how you can modify your plans to keep loved ones healthy and safe.



Find creative ways to keep traditions and make memories from afar.

Experts say the safest way to enjoy this holiday season is to stay home and celebrate with only your immediate household. But doing so doesn't mean you can't "see" your extended family and friends. Phones and tablets allow us to stay connected and get creative with family traditions this holiday season.

Some people should be extra careful to avoid in-person holiday gatherings this year, as hard as that might be.

Although many people with COVID-19 infection will have only mild symptoms – and some don't have any – others can become very ill and even die. This is especially true for older adults and people with serious medical conditions, including diabetes, heart or lung disease, cancer or a weakened immune system.

So even though you might feel bad about not including a loved one who is considered high-risk this year, it's safest to find other ways to show your love. Consider delivering some meals outside their front door, sending flowers or finding other gestures to show you are thinking of them.

It's OK to say 'no'.

If you don't feel comfortable, it's OK to turn down invitations for dinners or parties or propose a safer alternative. Friends, family and employers should be understanding.

Don't try to go it alone if you're feeling depressed this holiday. Seek help.

If you're feeling unusually sad, depressed, or anxious over the holidays, Atrium Health has a Behavioral Health Help Line that's available 24/7 at 704-444-2400. It is staffed by master-level mental health professionals who can offer support, make referrals to behavioral health specialists, and provide information on community resources. To learn more, visit AtriumHealth.org/BehavioralHealth.

If you plan to celebrate with others, think ahead and set ground rules in advance.

Your habits at home and how you and your circle choose to celebrate can directly affect community spread of the virus.

If you decide to gather with extended family or other people outside of your household, do it as safely as possible. **For example:**



Assume people outside of those who you live with may be infected. Similarly, you could be unknowingly carrying the virus too. If you are staying with or hosting anyone, talk about quarantining (staying at home) for a period of time before getting together to lower the chance that someone is carrying the virus. People can carry the virus without having symptoms.



Keep it small. More people equals more risk. Think about how you can reasonably keep non-household guests spaced apart from one another.



Outdoors is better than in. Even smaller indoor gatherings present risks and should be avoided. So bundle up, stay outside and ask everyone to wear masks when not eating or drinking.



Keep at least a 6-foot distance between you and others, wear masks to protect yourself and others and wash hands often. Wash for at least 20 seconds, scrubbing the fronts and backs of hands, and keep hand sanitizer handy.



Resist the urge to shake hands or give hugs to people not in your household this year.



Use single-use plates and cups and assign one person to pass out shared items, like food containers, dressings and condiments. Or find activities that don't involve eating (and taking off your mask) like going on a distanced hike, nature walk or bike ride.



Get your flu shot if you haven't already. The flu spreads this time of year, too. Getting the flu shot will help to protect you and prevent spreading sickness to others.

For a complete list of recommendations, be sure to **read and share** the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) recommendations for holiday gatherings](#) and follow state and local regulations, especially as it relates to travel, self-quarantining and COVID-19 testing.

Examples of holiday activities and how likely they are to spread COVID-19

Lower risk activities

- Having a small dinner with only people in your household
- Preparing favorite family recipes and safely delivering a meal to family or friends who may be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19
- Watching movies, parades or sports event from home

Moderate risk activities

- Having a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community
- Visiting a tree farm, orchard or nature preserve that allows for social distancing, and wearing a mask too

Higher risk activities

- Going shopping in crowded stores
- Attending an indoor gathering or party with people from outside your household
- Taking part in or watching a sports event with few precautions in place