

# Changes In Holiday Gatherings During A Pandemic

by Lee Batsakis

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The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed how families across the country will celebrate this holiday season. Experts have advised that even a small family gathering can spread the virus. Despite the warnings, many families will choose to gather in-person.

If you are one of the 330 million Americans trying to decide whether or not to gather with family members outside of your immediate household this holiday season, it is important to weigh the risks and know what precautions to take after the event.

“I would advise that the guests that you offer into your home, you make sure that they are wearing a mask. I would still try to distance yourself six feet from your visitors. Probably the only exception to that would be if your company, your visitors, are within your cohort of family that you have always remained with,” says Cindy Deuser, MSHA, BSN, RN, director of quality and safety, OSF HealthCare.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is important to always comply with the following three basic preventive measures if you plan to attend any gathering during the pandemic: maintain at least three feet of distance from others and wear a mask if you cannot guarantee this distance, cover a sneeze or cough with a tissue or bent elbow, and immediately dispose of tissue in a closed-lid bin.

When it comes to who you choose to gather with this holiday season, Deuser recommends keeping your circle small.

“Trust the people you’re going to be gathering with. Know their habits. Ensure, or have them ensure you, that they have been careful outside of your presence – that they are masking and distancing and using good hand hygiene. And if they are feeling sick, encourage them to stay home and take care of themselves.”

After the event, you should plan to stay home as much as possible and avoid being around people at increased risk for developing a severe illness from COVID-19.

If you participated in higher risk activities, or think that you may have been exposed during your celebration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises taking extra precautions for 14 days after the event.

Most importantly, Deuser says self-monitoring at home is crucial during the aftermath of a holiday get-together.

“You want to just continue observing for symptoms – fever, coughing, feeling short of breath. Making sure that you are diligently using hand washing, hand hygiene. And monitor yourself for at least ten days. Given the ten days, if you were to have a contagion it will present itself within that period of time,” says Deuser.

“If you find yourself developing symptoms – even if they are a little bit minor you might think they’re not too much – I wouldn’t wait too long. Don’t wait more than a

couple days and then call your provider and let them know what your symptoms are, and most probably they will ask you to get a COVID test.”

According to the WHO, any decision to hold an event during the COVID-19 pandemic, no matter how large or small, should rely on a risk-based approach.

Deuser adds, “It really is key not to let your guard down. We know that there’s been an influx recently of what we call a high positivity rate in the area. And it’s not only in the Metro Region, but it really is throughout all of the state of Illinois – and we need to make sure that we’re diligent.”