

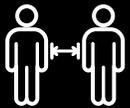
# WINTER HOLIDAY COVID-19 GUIDANCE

## WHY IS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON RISKY?

As we enter the holiday season, the risk of exposure to and spreading of COVID-19 increases. Many gatherings are moving inside homes and gathering spaces, which may have poor ventilation and little room for social distancing. This document will discuss why winter gatherings might be risky and what you can do to mitigate risk and/or plan safer gatherings.

## HOW TO DETERMINE RISK

### ACTIVITIES ARE CONSIDERED TO BE LOWER RISK IF:



People can maintain at least 6ft between each other



They are held in outdoor spaces



People are wearing masks

There are many things to consider before going out, attending a holiday celebration, or gathering with friends and family. In general, the more closely you interact with others and the longer the interaction is, there is a higher risk that COVID-19 will be spread.

**Before you make plans, ask yourself a few questions:**

- **Is COVID-19 spreading in your community?** Check out the [Virginia Department of Health's website](#) to learn more about COVID-19 in your area.
- **Will you have a potential close contact with someone who is sick or anyone who is not wearing a mask?** Think about the people you will be seeing and if they will be wearing masks.
- **Are you at increased risk of severe illness or do you live with someone who is at risk for severe illness?** Check out the [CDC's website](#) for more information.
- **Do you take everyday actions to protect yourself from COVID-19?** If you are not taking actions to protect yourself, you could be at risk of infecting others.

PRODUCED BY THE CENTRAL SHENANDOAH HEALTH DISTRICT

We are going to discuss general risk categories (low/medium/high), but it is impossible to provide risk levels for all activities in every community. You know your community, health, and personal situation better than anyone else, so use the above questions as a guide to going out.

When deciding to do specific activities, think about the following questions:

- **How many people will you interact with? Will they be wearing masks? Do they live in your household?** Interacting with more people and those who don't live in your household raises your risk and the risk level of the activity.
- **Can you keep 6ft of space between you and others? Will you be outdoors or indoors?** The closer you are to people, the greater your risk of getting sick. Indoor spaces are more risky than outdoor spaces where it might be harder to stay distanced and there is less ventilation.
- **What is the length of time you will be interacting with people?** The more time you spend with people, the greater your risk and their risk of getting sick.

During the winter holiday season, it is also important to consider:

- **Do you have to travel to the event? Or are any participants traveling to the event?** There are many places travelers can be exposed to the virus like airports, bus stations, trains, etc. Also, it is important to think about where you are traveling from - Is it an area with high community spread?

## ALTERING RISK LEVELS



**SET RULES AND STICK TO THEM.** Discuss and agree on rules in advance like wearing mask, no hugging, etc.



**SET A TIME LIMIT.** Limit the amount of time you are with people who do not live in your household.



**ANY PREVENTATIVE MEASURES ARE BETTER THAN NONE.** Wear masks, limit your exposure before the event, open windows, etc.

# WINTER HOLIDAY RISKS

## LOW RISK

While determining risk level is ultimately up to you and your family, here are some lower risk winter holiday activities:

-  Having a small celebration or dinner with people who live in your household
-  Sending family and friends gifts in the mail or delivering them in contact-less way
-  Having a virtual dinner with family and friends
-  Watching sports and your favorite holiday movies from home
-  Buying gifts and decorations online

## MODERATE RISK

While determining risk level is ultimately up to you and your family, here are some medium risk winter holiday activities:

-  Having a small outdoor dinner or celebration with family and friends who live in your community (Ask families to bring their own food, drinks, and utensils)
-  Visiting pumpkin patches, orchards, Christmas tree farms, etc. where people are using hand sanitizer, wearing masks, and practicing social distancing
-  Attending small outdoor sports events where safety precautions are in place and enforced

## HIGH RISK

While determining risk level is ultimately up to you and your family, here are some higher risk winter holiday activities:

-  Attending large indoor celebrations, gatherings, dinners, etc. with people from outside your household
-  Shopping in crowded stores
-  Participating or being a spectator at crowded events like sports, races, caroling, parades, etc.
-  Using alcohol or drugs that may alter judgement and make it more difficult to practice COVID-19 safety measures

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

We have seen COVID-19 infections increase across our health district and as we enter the holiday season it is more important than ever to take precautions. Without mitigation efforts by community members, our case numbers will continue to increase. As leaders in your communities, there are things that you can do to set an example for your congregations and to keep them safe. Below are some ideas on how to safely celebrate and influence your communities this holiday season:

- **MAKE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT:** It is very unlikely that the COVID-19 pandemic is going to be gone before the winter holidays. Start making plans for your holiday celebrations and religious ceremonies and stick to them. This will help your community plan for the holiday season and allow them to modify their expectations.
- **INCLUDE PREVENTION MESSAGING IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS:** You are a role model for your community. Start including prevention messaging in your communication to your community members. Remind your community to wear masks, wash their hands, social distance, etc.
- **LEAD BY EXAMPLE:** The holiday season is going to look very different this year. Start talking about how your personal holiday plans are changing and what you are doing to protect your loved ones (Ex, only celebrating with those you live with, new traditions you are starting, virtually celebrating with those who live in different states, etc.). Acknowledge that the sacrifices your community members are making are going to be hard, but that they are very important in stopping the spread of COVID-19. Ask other members to share how their plans are changing.
- **WEAR A MASK.** Encourage the use of mask wearing. Masks are essential when social distancing is difficult.
- **STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH THE GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDERS:** On November 13th the Governor issued an amendment to [Executive Order 67](#), limiting indoor gatherings to 25 people. For religious services, if there are more than 25 attendees you need to follow [Phase 3 guidelines](#). As the holiday season approaches, make sure to stay up-to-date with any new amendments issued by the Governor's office.

## SPECIFIC TRADITIONS

The following information is meant to provide you with recommendations on how to celebrate safely this year, but is not intended to infringe on the rights of faith communities or replace restrictions implemented by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### MUSIC

Music, singing, and instruments are large parts of holiday celebrations, but can also contribute to the spread of COVID-19. To keep your communities safe this holiday season, consider:

- Use pre-recorded music or streamed music as an alternative to live music
- Congregational singing is not recommended, but if you do allow singing, make sure households are properly distanced and wearing masks.
- If you do have a chorus try to reduce the number of singers/performers and make sure that they are properly distanced (at least 6ft apart), wearing masks, and the space has as much ventilation as possible.
- If you use musical instruments, players should wear masks if possible, increase the distance between players, consider coverings for brass and woodwind players, and take precautions when cleaning instruments.

### IN-PERSON GATHERINGS

In-person gatherings (like religious services, parties, etc.) are important parts of the holiday season, but can also contribute to the spread of COVID-19. To keep your communities safe this holiday season, consider:

- Stagger arrivals to religious services or use an appointment based system.
- Host outdoor, drive-in, or online services.

### COMMUNAL MEALS

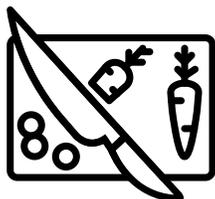
Holiday celebrations and meals are important parts of the holiday season, but can also contribute to the spread of COVID-19. To keep your communities safe this season, consider:

- Create a sign-up sheet and ask community members to drop off food/gifts for those who are vulnerable.
- Host outdoor picnics where people bring their own food, utensils, etc. and sit at least 6ft apart from other households.
- Create a document with shared recipes.

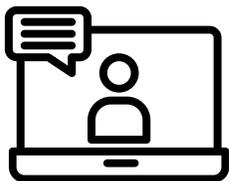
# TIPS FOR CELEBRATING SAFELY

## SAFE

INSTEAD OF ATTENDING A GATHERING, YOU SHOULD:



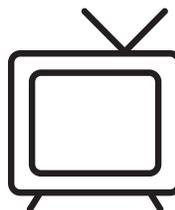
**PREPARE FOOD** with members of your household



**HOST A VIRTUAL dinner** with loved ones



**DECORATE** your home



**WATCH** parades, sports, and movies at home



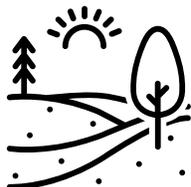
**SHOP ONLINE** at your favorite stores

## LESS SAFE

IF YOU DO ATTEND A GATHERING, YOU SHOULD:



**KEEP IT SMALL** and stay local



**STAY OUTSIDE** as much as possible



**WEAR A MASK** and keep your distance



**WASH YOUR HANDS** and disinfect high touch surfaces



**AVOID CONTACT** with others 14 days before and after you attend an event

## UNSAFE

IF YOU DO ATTEND A GATHERING, YOU SHOULD AVOID:



**LARGE GATHERINGS**, especially indoor gatherings



**POTLUCKS, BUFFETS**, and other shared food



**CROWDED SPACES**, like stores, sporting events, etc.



**CONTACT WITH ANYONE WHO IS SICK** or may have been exposed to COVID-19

## CONCLUSION

If you attend a gathering or participate in an activity that meets any of the above risk levels or you feel like it was risky, it is important to take responsibility for that and limit your exposure to others and monitor your symptoms in the days after the activity. If you develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the event or activity, immediately notify the host and others who attended.

We have had a hard year apart from our loved ones, but if we are going to continue to keep ourselves safe, then we need to buckle down and opt for lower risk activities this holiday season. It is up to you to have a healthy and happy holiday season!

## RESOURCES

### Virginia Department of Health:

- Faith-Based Organizations: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/faith-based-organizations/>
- Social Gatherings and Public Indoor Spaces: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/social-gatherings/>

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Considerations for Communities of Faith: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>
- Holiday Celebrations and Small Gatherings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>