

The Road to Reopening: Thanksgiving Guidance



Guidelines and tips for a safe Thanksgiving during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Thanksgiving is traditionally a time to gather with friends and family to share and reflect on what we are thankful for. Connecting with others is still an important tradition this year, but the Thanksgiving holiday may look a little different given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Services (PHHS) has put together some guidance to help guide you as you make your Thanksgiving plans as safe as possible.

This document details the possible risk levels of traditional Thanksgiving activities, such as large gatherings, traveling, and shopping in crowded stores. These activities can be made as safe as possible by staying COVID Aware, but when it comes to being around others, there is always risk involved. Loved ones may insist that you visit, or may be determined to visit you, but if you don't feel comfortable traveling or gathering this season, remember that it's okay to say "no."

As always, if you're feeling sick, have recently tested positive for COVID-19, or have been identified as a close contact, stay home and don't travel or have guests over the holiday. See the [CDC's Holiday Celebrations page](#) for additional guidance on gathering during fall and winter holidays. If you would like further guidance for a Thanksgiving event that is not covered in this document, please email coronavirus@como.gov.

Risk Levels

Below are some things to take into consideration, according to the CDC.

Celebrating virtually or with members of your own household poses a low risk for spread. In-person gatherings pose varying levels of risk. Event organizers and attendees should consider the risk of virus spread based on event size and use of mitigation strategies, as outlined in the [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#). There are several factors that contribute to the risk of getting infected or infecting others with the virus that causes COVID-19 at a holiday celebration. In combination, these factors will create various amounts of risk, so it is important to consider them individually and together:

- **Community levels of COVID-19** – Higher levels of COVID-19 cases and community spread in the gathering location, as well as where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees. Family and friends should consider the number of COVID-19 cases and the case rate in their community and in the community where they plan to celebrate when considering whether to host or attend a holiday celebration. Information on the number of cases in an area can be found on the area's health department website.
- **The location of the gathering** – Indoor gatherings generally pose more risk than outdoor gatherings. Indoor gatherings with poor ventilation pose more risk than those with good ventilation, such as those with open windows or doors.
- The duration of the gathering – Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter gatherings.
- **The number of people at the gathering** – Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. The CDC does not have a limit or recommend a specific number of attendees for gatherings. The size of a holiday gathering should be determined based on the ability to reduce or limit contact between attendees, the risk of spread between attendees, and state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations.
- **The locations attendees are traveling from** – Gatherings with attendees who are traveling from different places pose a higher risk than gatherings with attendees who live in the same area. Higher levels of COVID-19 cases and community spread in the gathering location, or where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees.
- **The behaviors of attendees prior to the gathering** – Gatherings with attendees who are not adhering to social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart), mask wearing, hand washing, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk than gatherings with attendees who are engaging in these preventative behaviors.
- **The behaviors of attendees during the gathering** – Gatherings with more preventive measures, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing, in place pose less risk than gatherings where fewer or no preventive measures are being implemented.



Risk Levels

Given this information, PHHS has categorized traditional Thanksgiving activities into risk categories to help you and your loved ones stay as safe as possible. Please note that the following Thanksgiving activity risk levels are based on the transmission levels in Boone County, MO. It is also important to remember that the risk of coronavirus transmission will still be present, even with these safety guidelines in place.

Lower Risk Activities

- Having Thanksgiving dinner with only people who live in your household.
 - Don't want to cook an entire Thanksgiving meal for a small group? Try something different this year. Create Thanksgiving-inspired dishes that don't require you spending all day in the kitchen, like turkey & cranberry meatballs. Or, ask local restaurants if they will have a Thanksgiving take-out menu.
- Preparing traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and delivering them in a way that doesn't involve contact with others.
- Having a virtual dinner and sharing recipes and thanks with friends and family, or having everyone make a few of the same dishes.
- Taking advantage of online sales, curbside pick-up or delivery.
- Watching sports events, parades and movies from home.

Moderate Risk Activities

- Having a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community.
 - Instead of potluck-style gatherings, encourage guests to bring food and drinks for themselves and for members of their own household only.
 - Lower your risk by following [CDC's recommendations on hosting gatherings or cook-outs](#).
- Visiting pumpkin patches or orchards where people use hand sanitizer before touching pumpkins or picking apples, wearing masks is encouraged or enforced, and people are able to maintain social distancing.
- Attending small outdoor sports events with safety precautions in place.

High Risk Activities

- Going shopping in crowded stores just before, on, or after Thanksgiving.
- Participating in or being a spectator at a crowded running race.
 - See if this year's Turkey Trot has a virtual option. Instead of going to the race, give the neighbors something to talk about by donning your best Turkey Day gear and running around the neighborhood.
- Attending crowded parades or festivals.
- Using alcohol or drugs, which can cloud judgement and increase risky behavior.
- Attending large indoor gatherings with people from outside of your household.

Meal/Gathering Guidance

Before you begin planning your gathering, check the [most recent Health Order](#) for gathering limits. If your gathering or event will exceed the limits in the Health Order, submit an Operational Plan for review. Plans can be submitted through this online form: <https://forms.gle/PxGzJzTizR2vtWui7>. It can also be found on our website under the Business and Mask Guidance tab here: <https://www.como.gov/coronavirus/business-guidance/>

If you are gathering outside of Boone County, make sure to check the gathering limits for that area. Consider the following as you make your plans:

- Remind guests to stay home if they are feeling sick or have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Arrange tables and chairs to promote social distancing. Weather permitting, consider eating outside.
- If weather permits, spend more time outdoors than indoors.
- Consider wearing masks when less than 6 feet apart from others.
- Encourage guests to wash their hands frequently, including before and after eating.
- In addition to washing hands regularly, make hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol readily available for those attending the gathering.
- Limit the number of people that are serving or handling food.
 - Also limit the number of people going in and out of areas where food is being prepared (kitchen, grill, etc.)
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces whenever possible.
 - Consider touchless garbage cans.
 - Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces frequently throughout the duration of the gathering.
 - Disinfectant can be made at home by creating a bleach solution of 1/3 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water.
 - Refer to the EPA's webpage on Disinfectants for Coronavirus to find an approved disinfectant.
- Serve food cafeteria style or plated meals, rather than buffet style in which all attendees are touching the same serving utensils.
- If you will have the TV on or music playing, keep the volume low to reduce the need for loud talking or shouting.
- The longer people are around each other, there is a greater chance that they will engage in behaviors that increase the likelihood of transmission. Try to keep gatherings as short as possible.
- Consider alternative ways for saying hello and goodbye. Instead of the traditional hugs and kisses, consider elbow bumps, air hugs, or a wave. Or get creative and see who has the best turkey call.

Travel Guidance

Thanksgiving is a time when many families travel long distances to celebrate together. Travel increases the chance of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. If you must travel, be informed of the risks involved.

Before You Travel

- Consider the mode of transportation, the dates that you'll be traveling, and assess your risk of exposure to COVID-19 while traveling.
 - Driving your own vehicle will reduce your exposure to COVID-19.
 - Be COVID Aware when visiting gas stations. It is recommended to wash or sanitize hands before and after using the gas pump, practicing social distancing at all times, and wearing a mask when entering gas stations.
 - Commercial and public transportation increases your risk of exposure to COVID-19.
 - Consider traveling during non-peak times when there will be less people.
 - Be COVID Aware when visiting airports, train/bus stations and other public transportation facilities. It is recommended to wash or sanitize hands frequently, practice social distancing at all times, and wear a mask when around others.
- Know when to delay or cancel your travel plans.
 - Do not travel if you are sick with fever, cough, or other symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Do not travel if you have recently tested positive for COVID-19, are waiting for results of a COVID-19 test, or have had close contact in the past 14 days with a person who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19.
 - If you have been asked to quarantine, delay your travel until after the full 14 days of quarantine, even if you don't have symptoms.
 - If you test positive for COVID-19 while at your destination, isolate yourself from others for a minimum of 10 days and delay your return.

After You Travel

You may have been exposed to COVID-19 on your travels. You may feel well and not have any symptoms, but you can be contagious without symptoms and spread the virus to others. You and your travel companions (including children) pose a risk to your family, friends, and community for 14 days after you were exposed to the virus. Regardless of where you traveled or what you did during your trip, take these actions to protect others from getting sick after you return:

- When around others, stay at least 6 feet from other people who are not from your household. It is important to do this everywhere, both indoors and outdoors.
- Wear a mask to keep your nose and mouth covered when you are outside of your home.
- Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Watch your health and look for symptoms of COVID-19. Take your temperature if you feel sick.



Travel Guidance

Follow state, territorial, tribal and local recommendations or requirements after travel.

Higher Risk Activities

Some types of travel and activities can put you at higher risk for exposure to COVID-19 (i.e. large social gatherings, sporting events, parades, being in crowded areas like an airport, etc.). If you participated in higher risk activities or think that you may have been exposed before or during your trip, take extra precautions (in addition the ones listed above) to protect others for 14 days after you arrive home:

- 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.

Overnight Guests

If you plan to have or be an overnight guest, the host and guests should communicate about what is expected ahead of time. Consider the following:

- Are those in the home or those visiting in good health? This includes older adults and individuals with medical conditions that put them at higher risk of severe illness.
- Identify a room where an individual can isolate should they develop symptoms or test positive while visiting.
- Ensure that soap and sanitizer are available and frequently clean and disinfect high touch surfaces with an EPA-approved disinfectant.
 - Disinfectant can be made at home by creating a bleach solution of 1/3 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water.
 - Refer to the EPA's webpage on Disinfectants for Coronavirus to find an approved disinfectant.
- Wear masks when together, especially when indoors and when social distance cannot be maintained.

Tips for Visiting Vulnerable Family and Friends

- It is recommended that visits to vulnerable family and friends are done so on the most limited basis possible.
- Plan the visit in advance to ensure everyone is in agreement on behaviors (i.e. mask wearing, social distancing).
- When visiting vulnerable family and friends, do so from a safe distance.
- Keep gatherings outside at all times, if possible.
- Encourage everyone in attendance to wear masks and keep them on for the duration of the visit.
- Limit the use of shared items. If there will be shared items, clean and disinfect them frequently.



Shopping Guidance

For Customers

- Stay home if sick or have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Carry hand sanitizer while you're shopping and wash your hands before leaving home, and upon returning home.
- Avoid visibly large crowds where social distancing can be difficult.
 - Many stores are beginning their Black Friday deals now in order to avoid crowds.
- Take advantage of curbside pick-up or delivery options when possible.
- Bring your own disinfectant wipes for shopping carts in case the retailer does not have any available.
- Use contactless payment methods when possible (Apple Pay, tap to pay cards; etc.)
- Plan your Thanksgiving meal in advance and gather all groceries in one trip, if possible.
 - Try to go early in order to avoid last minute crowds.
 - Utilize curbside pick-up and grocery delivery options if possible.
- Keep your face mask on at all times while shopping, including when trying on clothes in fitting rooms.

For Retailers

- Encourage employees/staff to stay home if sick.
- Consider hosting sales over multiple days to reduce the number of people in the facility at one time.
- Promote online and curbside sales.
- Frequently disinfect shopping carts, baskets and other high touch surfaces.
- Encourage contactless payment methods when possible (Apple Pay, tap to pay cards; etc.)
- Close fitting rooms or disinfect items between individuals. Clothing should be laundered according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water settings and dry items completely. Items such as bracelets, necklaces, etc. should be disinfected with an EPA approved disinfectant.
 - If fitting rooms are open, assign an attendant to monitor use and cleaning.
- If holding sales that anticipate large crowds, consider adding social distancing markers leading into the store, in and around aisles, and to the cash register.

Volunteering

The holiday season is often a time for giving back. If you plan on volunteering this holiday season, here are some tips for staying COVID Aware.

- Do not volunteer if you are sick or are quarantining due to being a close contact.
- Consider virtual volunteer options rather than volunteering in person. Or make donations in lieu of volunteering.
 - For more opportunities to donate virtually, visit comohelps.org. CoMoHelps is a collaborative of Boone County, City of Columbia, Community Foundation of Central Missouri, Heart of Missouri United Way, and Veterans United Foundation. CoMoHelps serves as our community's official resource for receiving and managing donations for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - If volunteering in person, work with the organization to make sure that they have a COVID mitigation plan in place to keep all involved as safe as possible.
- Follow the COVID-19 policies and procedures of the organization you are volunteering with. For guidance on how businesses can operate during the pandemic, see [The Road to Reopening: Guidance for Businesses During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- Practice general hygiene and COVID precautions (handwashing, mask wearing, etc.)

FAQs

Is it safe to go see my grandparents this year?

See the section on Tips for Visiting Vulnerable Family and Friends. Also, review the Travel Guidance section if you would need to travel in order to see your grandparents. If your grandparents are in a nursing home, follow the visitation policies of that nursing home.

Do I need to wear a mask and socially distance if I'm just around family members?

A mask should be worn when you are around anyone who is not in your household, including family members who you do not live with. If the host asks that everyone wear a mask, respect that request or decline the invitation. The same goes for social distancing. Others may not feel comfortable being in close proximity to those outside of their household.

I just finished quarantining or isolating, can I still go to the gathering?

If you have completed the suggested 10 day isolation period and have been fever free for more than 24 hours, you may use your best judgement to determine if you should attend the gathering. It is recommended that you take all necessary precautions while at the gathering if you choose to attend.

I had COVID earlier this year. Does that mean I don't have to socially distance or wear a mask during the holidays?

No. Those who have had COVID-19 should still socially distance and wear a mask during the holidays. CDC recommends that all people, whether or not they have had COVID-19, take steps to prevent getting and spreading COVID-19. Wash hands regularly, stay at least 6 feet away from others whenever possible, and wear masks.

I want to spend time with family who do not live in my household, but they are not taking COVID-19 precautions seriously. What should I do?

If those you plan on visiting refuse to take precautions and you're not comfortable with that, consider staying home this year. If you will go, be upfront that you are practicing behaviors to keep yourself, and everyone else, safe. Review [this document from Emory](#) for tips on speaking with others about COVID concerns. If you are the one hosting, make it very clear to those who are visiting what the rules are and the consequences for not respecting them.

