If You Gather: A Safety Overview

This holiday season, being vaccinated is the safest way to protect yourself and those around you, especially those who are not eligible to get vaccinated, such as young children. If you or someone in your family is not yet fully vaccinated against COVID-19, you should consider the risk of gathering. Limiting your in-person gatherings will help protect you and your unvaccinated loved ones from becoming seriously ill.

The vaccines are highly effective in helping prevent serious illness and death, but if you decide to gather, whether vaccinated or not, there’s a risk of spreading COVID-19 infection. Vaccination, masks, handwashing, and staying home if you’re sick are all steps you can take to help protect others.

Holiday traditions are important for families and following the tips below may help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Public Gatherings

In general, if gathering in public right now:

- **Getting vaccinated** is the best way to protect yourself from severe illness, hospitalization or death due to COVID-19.
- **Mask up.** Vaccinated or not, people five years and older, are required to wear a face covering in all indoor public places, and at outdoor events with 500 or more people, such as concerts or sporting events. We strongly recommend that children between 2 and 4 years old also wear masks. More info on Washington’s mask requirement.
- **Stay home** if you’re sick or have any symptoms
- **Plan ahead.** Drive yourself or have alternate way to get home in case you find yourself in an unsafe or uncomfortable place, such as a crowded bar with people who are not wearing masks.

Private Gatherings

Before you host a social gathering

- **Review your guest list.** Think about who you are inviting. Are there people who may be in a high risk category, including young children who are not yet eligible for vaccination? Do you know whether your guests are vaccinated or not? If you don’t know, it’s important to ask so you can plan accordingly.
Plan ahead. If there are multiple unvaccinated households, or any households that have unvaccinated people at high-risk of severe COVID-19 illness, the safest option is to gather virtually. If you decide to gather in person, be really clear with friends and family about how you will make safety a priority when spending time together. View a sample conversation guide.

Travel safely. If you’re planning to travel to gather with family or friends, please follow CDC travel guidance. Be aware if you’re traveling to an area with high COVID-19 transmission, you’ll want to be extra vigilant with wearing a mask and staying 6 feet (2 meters) apart from others in public.

Take it outside. Outdoor gatherings are much safer than indoor ones. If you must be indoors, choose a location that is well ventilated, such as a room with open windows.

Keep it small. The smaller the better when gathering with people outside of your household.

Keep it short. Shorter periods of time give COVID-19 less chance to spread. Shorter gatherings also make it easier to keep hands and surfaces properly sanitized.

Consider the children. Kids may have trouble staying six feet apart, so wearing masks and washing hands are important. Remember: kids under 2 should never wear masks! If your family member is younger than 2 years old or cannot wear a mask, limit visits with people who are not vaccinated or whose vaccination status is unknown.

Do a health check. Ask if anyone has had symptoms such as cough, fever or shortness of breath, in the last 2 weeks. Ask guests to check their temperature before arriving. Anyone with a fever—or who has had other symptoms or knows they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 within the last two weeks—should stay home.

Get tested. Whether vaccinated or not, you can decrease the risk of infection by getting tested 72 hours before the gathering. At home tests can be completed the day of the event. Even with a negative test, it’s important to still follow the other safety precautions shared on this page.

Add WA Notify to your smartphone. This will alert you if you may have been exposed to COVID-19 and anonymously alert others if you test positive. WA Notify is completely private and doesn't know who you are or track where you go.

During a private gathering

- Wear masks. If you’re gathering indoors with people outside of your household, it’s recommended that everyone wear face coverings, unless most attendees are fully vaccinated. Have extra masks on hand if people forget.
- Wash hands. If there is no access to a sink, provide hand sanitizer.
- Watch distance and limit close contact. Where possible stay 6 feet apart, especially among people at high risk for severe COVID-19 or who are not yet fully vaccinated.
- Open windows. Keep windows open in rooms where people will gather to allow for proper ventilation.
- Clean. Disinfect frequently used surfaces before, during and after the gathering.

After a private gathering

- Wash hands (again). Wash for 20 seconds with soap and water.
- Sanitize. Clean all surfaces that may have been touched by guests such as tabletops, counters, doorknobs and bathroom fixtures, with soap and water first, and then a disinfecting agent.
- Watch for symptoms. If you develop any symptoms, get tested. Alert others at the gathering if there’s a positive test among anyone in attendance. Learn more about what to do if you’ve been exposed.