



Arkansas Department of Health

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Holiday Guidance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many traditional holiday activities can be high-risk for spreading viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, which is the cause of COVID-19. There are several safer, alternative ways to enjoy the holidays. As cases in Arkansas rise and you decide how you will celebrate the holidays, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) strongly encourages you to take the precautions listed below to protect yourself, your loved ones and others from the spread of COVID-19.

The following people **should not participate in any in-person holiday festivities** due to the risk of exposing others:

- Anyone who has tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 and is within their isolation period, whether or not they have symptoms.
- Anyone recently exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and is in their 14-day quarantine period, even if they have tested negative during that time.
- Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 may include: fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or otherwise feeling unwell.

General Considerations

- Be socially responsible when planning holiday activities. Even if you may not be at high risk for serious illness from COVID-19, you could spread the virus to vulnerable family members or members of your community. Ask elderly or at-risk family members if they feel comfortable participating this year. Many older individuals are trying to protect themselves but do not want to upset their family. Please honor their request.
- The holidays are often when people travel to celebrate with family. The Arkansas Department of Health recommends avoiding holiday travel this year and encourages you to connect virtually with your loved ones instead.
- Face coverings should be worn anytime you are with people who do not reside within your household.
- Avoid events and activities where large numbers of attendees are expected. If you attend events, ensure you always maintain 6-foot physical distance from anyone who does not live in your household.

- If you are hosting an event with attendees that do not reside within your household:
 - Evaluate the space you have available and limit the number of attendees such that all attendees can easily maintain 6-feet physical distance.
 - Consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.
 - Provide face coverings for any attendee who does not have one and encourage guests to wear them.
 - Encourage guests to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol as they arrive and throughout the event.
- The risk of COVID-19 transmission increases in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces. Therefore, indoor events have a much higher risk of transmission than outdoor events. If the event is to be held indoors, ensure there is adequate ventilation. Open windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather.
- Although there is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by food, it may be spread by sharing of utensils and congregating around the food serving area. Avoid sharing of serving utensils by having one person serve food for other attendees. Ensure adequate distancing between non-household groups is available at the dinner table.
- For those with loved ones in a nursing home or assisted living facility, be aware of the risk to that person if they leave their facility to attend a family gathering and are then infected with COVID-19. They also could take the disease back to their living facility and spread to others. ADH strongly recommends against taking a loved out of a nursing home to attend a family gathering. Be aware that most facilities are requiring a 14-day quarantine upon returning for those residents who leave. If there are no quarantine rooms available at the facility upon their return, the resident would need to be cared for at home until one is available. More holiday guidance on home visits for Long-term Care residents can be found [here](#).

In summary, **AVOID** situations with the following: **large numbers of people, poor ventilation, prolonged contact with others, crowding, and people NOT wearing masks.**

Lower Risk Activities

- Having a small dinner with only your household members.
- Hosting a virtual dinner with your extended friends and family using video technology.
- Choosing to watch holiday programs from your vehicle or through live stream when possible.
- Participating in online “Black Friday” and “Cyber Monday” events instead of shopping in-person.

Medium Risk Activities

- Having a small group (less than 10 persons) outdoor dinner with family and friends while maintaining 6-feet physical distancing and wearing cloth face coverings.
- Going to a pumpkin patch, Christmas tree farm, walk-through holiday light display, or other similar event in a large outdoor venue where appropriate mask use is enforced, and people can remain more than 6 feet apart.
- In-person shopping during “non-peak” times when physical distancing can be easily achieved.

High Risk Activities (AVOID)

- Travelling outside of your local area, especially to areas with higher COVID-19 infection rates.
- In-person shopping during “Black Friday” sales or other “peak” times when stores are likely to be

crowded.

- Large indoor gatherings with people outside of your household, including close friends and family.
- Attending office or community holiday parties or gatherings, attending a movie, or other indoor event where many people are likely to attend.

Additional Holiday Guidance for Places of Worship and Service/Civic Organizations

Places of Worship

In addition to the guidance for worship services found at the above link, we want to remind places of worship of the high risk of unmasked singing. We strongly recommend masking of the entire congregation for the entire duration of the worship service in order to prevent spread. In addition, ADH recommends against having a choir perform. Consider having a solo instead with the singer standing at least 12 feet from anyone else. ADH also recommends against the use of wind instruments, such as trumpet, flute, or clarinet, during the service.

ADH also recommends the following practices for holiday events:

- Consider hosting several events for smaller groups of people rather than one large event. Encourage attendees to sign up in advance to limit group size to allow for physical distancing to be maintained.
- If desiring to provide meals to the community, consider delivering the meals instead of hosting a large gathering.
- If a meal is provided on-site:
 - Use the largest facility available so that physical distancing of at least 6-feet can be maintained between household family groups.
 - Provide cafeteria style meal service instead of self-service buffets or consider a catered meal that is individually packaged for to-go service.
 - If weather permits, encourage outdoor dining.
- People should not engage in neighborhood caroling due to the high risk from unmasked singing and the difficulty of maintaining enough physical distance.
- ADH discourages Christmas plays or pageants due to the difficulty in maintaining both physical distancing and masking for both participants and spectators.

Service/Civic Organizations

In addition to the guidance linked above:

- Any holiday event or activity must comply with either the ADH Directive Regarding Large Indoor Venues or the Directive Regarding Large Outdoor Venues as applicable. Events that anticipate attendance greater than 100 persons must submit a plan in accordance with those Directives by clicking [here](#).
- “Pictures with Santa” events should be modified to maintain 6-foot physical distancing between attendees waiting in line as well as between the attendees and Santa.
- Instead of a traditional parade, consider hosting a “Reverse Parade” where the parade floats are stationary and attendees enjoy the festivities by driving through.

