



# Coronavirus Holidays – How to Celebrate Safely

by Julie Ferguson

*There's both good news and bad news on the Covid-19 front as we approach the holidays.*

**First, the good news.** This past week, Pfizer announced that they've developed a vaccine that is more than 90% effective. While more testing is needed, if all goes well and there are no unforeseen delays, it could be authorized for some high-risk populations by year end. Great news, but keep expectations in line...many health officials caution it may not be available for wide distribution until spring or summer of 2021. But still, hope is in sight. See [Pfizer's Covid Vaccine: 11 Things You Need to Know](#).

**Now the bad news.** Nationally, we are experiencing a spike in infections – in the U.S., we've just passed 10 million cases and we are rapidly approaching a quarter of a million deaths – all since March. Health officials warn of a difficult winter ahead and plead with us all to tighten up on prevention measures. Many states are implementing partial shutdowns, tightening restrictions, or rolling back the opening of some public facilities.

There are a few things contributing to these spikes. The CDC says that [small household gatherings are an important contributor to the rise in COVID-19 cases](#). There are far too many stories of a small family events that end in the tragedy. Another thing health authorities have learned is that the [duration of contact with a potentially infected person can have an impact on risk](#). The CDC defines a close contact as someone who was unmasked within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from two days before illness onset.

Another contributing factor in the spikes is human nature. We all have pandemic fatigue. We're all weary and sad from being separated from family, friends, and colleagues; We all miss the freedom and spontaneity of going to our favorite public places. This fatigue is leading people to drop their guard and take greater risks.

## How to Safely Celebrate Coronavirus Holidays



As we approach Thanksgiving and then segue into Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and New Year's, we need to make informed decisions about how we celebrate coronavirus holidays with families and friends. For many, the holidays are a very important family time, and making decisions to limit or forgo a family get-together may be a painful and difficult decision. It also may result in hurt feelings or arguments.

Health officials advise caution this year, saying that the safest path is to restrict celebrations to the people already in your **"bubble"** and to stay within your household. For larger celebrations, they suggest virtual gatherings. While this may mean that you will miss time with loved ones, remember that there is hope that if we all redouble our efforts and commitment to safety, the New Year will be a better one with the hope of a vaccine and a gradual resumption of a more normal life.

Here are some tips and tools for making decisions and staying safe over this year's coronavirus holidays.

### Assess Your Risk Factors

- Review your local risk. Every state and town have different experiences. See [the US tracking map](#) to monitor your locality. View your [state Health Departments](#) to learn your region's safety measures and restrictions.
- Do your guest live in high-risk regions? Factor that in your planning.
- Are you or any family members in high risk groups, such as **older adults**, people who are pregnant, disabled, or who have **certain medical conditions**?
- Does visiting family entail travel on public transportation for you or for them? If visits entail more than car travel, consider the risk factors involved. [Know your travel risks](#).

### Communicate in Advance

- Have a frank discussion comparing prevention practices with family members/potential guests. How big is their "bubble"? Everyone thinks they are cautious but dig a little deeper to find out if you have similar risk tolerances. Use this information to inform your decisions.
- Ask invited guests in advance about any concerns they have.
- If you are hosting, establish your planned safety measures, communicate them in advance to your guests, and get agreement they'll respect your wishes. For example, rules about social distancing, masks, what they should bring or shouldn't bring, etc.

- If you are a guest, find out what prevention measures will be taken and decide if you are comfortable with those measures.
- No pressure! Respect people's boundaries and choices. Give them the freedom to decline if they are not comfortable. Don't take it personally if they opt out. We all have different comfort levels.
- If you are uncomfortable attending a family event, just say so. Reassure the person you love them, but that in these difficult times you feel the need to limit your risk.

## Be Flexible and Creative

- No matter how meticulously you plan, outside circumstances can change. A guest could take ill. A state could restrict travel. Pandemic conditions are dynamic. Be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances. Manage your expectations if things don't come together.
- Plan outdoor celebrations if weather cooperates. Some people rent outside tents and others hold celebrations around fire pits. Consider holiday nature hikes, decorating an outdoor tree, or building socially distant snowmen.
- Consider virtual celebrations – sharing memories or stories, even sharing a virtual holiday dinner. Plan some activities in advance, such as caroling karaoke, sharing photos online from past holidays, or holding an ugly holiday sweater contest with prizes.
- If you can't dine with family, consider sending home-made treats, gourmet food items from favorite shops, family snack packs or beverages. Share recipes.
- For kids, Santa could visit virtually via Zoom. He should wear a mask to be a good role model.
- Get creative! This isn't a winter holiday video below, but it shows how creative people can be!

**Check Out:** ['Hug Machine' Lets Great-Grandma Hug Kids Despite Coronavirus Social Distancing](#)

## Make Safety the Bottom Line for Home Holiday Coronavirus Celebrations

- Limit the number of guests because each person you add increases the risk.
- Assess your space in advance to see how many you can accommodate within the 6-foot social distancing guidelines.
- Set up your clearly delineated social distancing seating / dining areas in advance.
- Avoid hugs, kisses, and handshakes this year, no matter how tempting.
- Require mask-wearing both inside and outside, except while eating or drinking. Masks should cover the nose and the mouth.



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- Increase air flow and ventilation by opening windows and doors, if weather permits, or set central air and heating to continuous circulation.
- Discourage singing, shouting, and loud talking that can disperse airborne droplets.
- If hosting, provide hand soap, water, sanitizer, disposable hand towels, and extra disposable masks.
- If a guest, bring your own sanitary wipes, an extra mask, and hand sanitizer.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items such as serving utensils.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces such as bathroom faucets and doorknobs.
- Treat pets as you would other human family members – don't let pets interact with people outside the household.
- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled.
- Have one mask-wearing person serve all the food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
- Have one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, plates and utensils, and condiments.
- Be careful about alcohol. Alcohol lowers inhibitions, reduces judgement, and can lead to carelessness.