

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health (BPH) continues to respond to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in West Virginia. BPH is working closely with communities, state agencies, local and federal partners to monitor the ongoing risk of COVID-19 and ensure the health and protection of all individuals in West Virginia.

As the fall and winter holiday season approaches and many people begin to plan for holiday celebrations and related travel, BPH offers the following guidance to help protect individuals, their families, and communities from COVID-19.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- Recent loss of taste or smell

PERSON-TO-PERSON TRANSMISSION

- Occurs via small droplets from the nose or mouth of the infected person when they cough, sneeze, or exhale.
- Virus can remain on surfaces for a limited time period. Although less common, transmission may occur from touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

GENERAL PREVENTION

- Learn about COVID-19 from reputable sources.
- Maintain physical distance of at least six feet between yourself and others.
- Encourage proper handwashing.
- Clean and sanitize surfaces often.
- Do not share food, drinks, etc.
- Wear cloth face coverings.
- Stay home if you feel sick.
- Isolate sick individuals.

PEOPLE WHO SHOULD NOT ATTEND IN-PERSON HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

People with or exposed to COVID-19

Do not host or participate in any in-person festivities if you or anyone in your household:

- Has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not met the criteria for when it is safe to be around others.
- Has symptoms of COVID-19.

- Is waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- May have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

People at increased risk for severe illness

If you are at increased risk for severe illness or you live or work with someone at increased risk for severe illness, you should avoid in-person holiday celebrations with those outside of your household. If you decide to attend an in-person gathering with people who do not live in your household, avoid larger gatherings, and consider attending events that pose lower risk of COVID-19 transmission as described in this guidance.

RISK OF VIRUS SPREAD

The following factors contribute to the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 and should be considered individually and together to determine the risk of infection at a holiday celebration:

- **Virtual vs. in-person celebrations** – Virtual celebrations or celebrating with your own household members pose low risk for spread of COVID-19.
- **Community levels of COVID-19** – Higher levels of COVID-19 in the community increase the risk of spread at a holiday event. When considering whether to attend or host an event, families and friends should check the [levels of COVID-19](#) in their own community and in the community where they plan to celebrate.
- **The location of the gathering** – Activities in poorly ventilated indoor locations increase the risk of spread of COVID-19. Outdoor locations or those with open windows and doors are better alternatives.

- **The duration of the gathering** – Gatherings that last longer pose a greater risk than shorter gatherings.
- **The number of people at the gathering** – Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. Limiting the number of attendees helps avoid higher risk of spread.
- **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. Therefore, celebrating with people from the local community is preferred.

HOLIDAY TRAVEL

Traveling increases the chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Use information from the following webpages to decide whether to go on holiday travel:

- [Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Know Your Travel Risk](#)
- [Know When to Delay Your Travel to Avoid Spreading COVID-19](#)

If you decide to travel, follow these safety measures during your trip to protect yourself and others from COVID-19:

- Wear a mask in public settings, such as public and mass transportation, events and gatherings, and anywhere you will be around other people.
- Avoid close contact by staying at least six feet apart from anyone who is not from your household.
- Wash often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Avoid contact with anyone who is sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Get your flu vaccine

Gatherings can contribute to the spread of other infectious diseases, including flu. Getting a flu vaccine is an essential part of protecting your health and your family's health this season. Get a flu shot as soon as possible before the holidays.

HOSTING OR ATTENDING A HOLIDAY GATHERING

- Host or attend outdoor activities rather than indoor activities when possible. If this is not possible, avoid crowded, poorly ventilated, or fully enclosed indoor spaces. Increase ventilation by opening windows and doors as weather conditions permit.
- Host or attend activities with only people from your local area as much as possible.
- Limit numbers of people at gatherings as much as possible.
- Obtain and provide updated COVID-19 safety guidance in order to prevent the spread of the virus.
- If you are hosting a gathering, encourage attendees to bring supplies such as extra masks, hand sanitizers, or tissues to help everyone stay healthy. If you are attending a gathering, bring these supplies to protect yourself.
- If the gathering will include people from more than one household, all guests should aim at strictly avoiding close contact with people who are not in their households for 14 days before the gathering.

STEPS TO TAKE DURING GATHERINGS

Follow these tips to reduce your risk of being exposed to, getting, or spreading COVID-19 during the celebration:

- Maintain a distance of six feet from people not in your household. Avoid using restroom facilities at high traffic times, such as at the end of a public event.
- If you plan to [eat out at a restaurant](#), avoid busy eating areas and high volume mealtimes.
- Wave and verbally greet persons instead of using gestures that promote close contact such as handshaking, bumping elbows, or giving hugs.
- Wear a mask at all times when around people who do not live in your household. Do not swap masks with other people. When not wearing a mask or when within six feet from others, avoid singing, chanting, or shouting, which increases the spread of the virus.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces by cleaning and disinfecting those surfaces and any shared items between use. Using touchless

garbage bags and gloves when handling trash decreases contact with commonly touched surfaces.

- [Wash your hands](#) often as recommended by the CDC. If this is not feasible, use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

SAFETY AROUND FOOD AND DRINKS

- Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or if not available, use adequate hand sanitizer before and after preparing, serving, and eating food.
- If there are people from different households attending:
 - Encourage guests to bring food and drinks for themselves and for members of their own household only instead of potluck-style eating.
 - Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible.
 - Wear a mask while preparing or serving food to others.
- If serving any food, consider having one person serve all the food and one person serve sharable items (e.g., salad dressings, utensils), so that multiple people are not handling food and serving utensils.
- Consider providing single-use options.
- Avoid buffet-style serving for food, drinks, or condiments. Use grab-and-go meal options, if available.
- Wash and disinfect any reusable items after the event.

AFTER THE CELEBRATION

If you participated in higher risk activities as described in this guidance or think that you may have been exposed during your celebration, take extra precautions (in addition to the ones listed above) for 14 days after the event to protect others:

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Avoid being around people at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- Consider getting tested for COVID-19.

If you develop [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) or if you test positive for COVID-19:

- Immediately contact the host of the event that you attended to advise them. They may need to inform other attendees about their possible exposure to the virus.
- Contact your health care provider and follow the CDC recommended steps for [what to do if you become sick](#).

If you are waiting for your COVID-19 test results, stay home until you have a result and [follow CDC's guidance](#) to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

If you are notified that you were in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, follow the steps as recommended by your public health workers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Tips for hosting gatherings](#)
- [Considerations for attending an event or gathering](#)
- [Travel risk during COVID-19 pandemic](#)

More detailed tips for holiday celebrations:

- [Halloween, Dia de los Muertos, Thanksgiving](#)

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the 24/7, toll-free COVID-19 information hotline:

1-800-887-4304