

The background features a stylized autumn landscape. In the foreground, there are several pumpkins in shades of orange and yellow. In the middle ground, two scarecrows are visible: one in an orange outfit and one in a blue outfit, both with black crow perched on their shoulders. Behind them are tall corn stalks with green leaves and yellow cobs. The sky is light blue with a few falling leaves.

# Public Health Advice for Winter Holiday Gatherings “No Empty Seats in 2021”

Dallas County Public Health Committee  
November 2020

Reference:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

The following advice from the public health community is offered to keep you and your family safe from the deadly COVID-19 pandemic during the upcoming holiday season.

Following this advice will help us avoid more empty seats at our holiday tables in 2021.

Please don't let COVID be your uninvited guest this holiday season.

# Traveling

- Reconsider travel during the holiday season and consider holding special remote gatherings or safe gatherings at home with only household members.
- If you choose to travel, consider having celebrations on a different day, week, or month to allow for travel during less popular times.
- Be aware of the risk level of your destination and any stops on your way to the destination.
- Wear a mask, stay 6 feet or more from others when around individuals not in your household, and wash your hands frequently.
- Carry a small personal sanitizing kit that contains hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and extra masks.
- It is safer to drive your own automobile than to take commercial or public transportation.
- If you need to use commercial or public transportation, be aware of, and try to avoid, the busiest travel days and times.
- Do not travel if you are sick with fever, cough, or other symptoms of COVID-19 or other illnesses such as flu.
- 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.

# Celebrating

- The safest approach is to defer Thanksgiving this year and other holiday gatherings with any individuals who do not live under your same roof.
- Both the host and guests should try to limit their activities and exposure opportunities during the two weeks before the visit; the best option is for the host and guests to quarantine for 14 days before seeing each other to minimize the risk of exposure.
- Clean your gathering spot and wipe down all high touch surfaces like faucets, countertops and bathrooms before your guests arrive.
- If you consider gathering with people outside your immediate household, such as relatives or friends, and you cannot be sure they have not been exposed to COVID-19, don't participate.
- Suggest that handshakes and hugs be replaced with waves, verbal greetings, "air high-fives," or "air hugs."
- If members of your household go out in public to work or socialize, protect yourself by keeping more than 6 feet away from them and wearing a masking when they are around.
- If you want to socialize with friends or family members who do not live with you, have a family member who knows computers set up a computer gathering by Zoom or Teams computer hookup so you don't have to gather in person.
- We realize some members of the family, particularly seniors living alone may be joining a household for the celebration. However, other than accommodation for those living alone (which is still not recommended, but may occur) combining households should be avoided.

# Celebrating cont.

- If there are gatherings of individuals who don't live together, strongly consider:
  - Have plenty of alcohol-based hand sanitizer and place in areas where it can be used frequently.
  - Keep the festivities limited in time, for example, no more than 2 hours.
  - Have the festivities outside, weather permitting.
  - Ensure that your home is well ventilated. This can be accomplished by turning your central heating / air conditioner unit fan on high, and weather permitting, open your windows.
  - When individuals are gathered together (inside or outside), all individuals should wear a mask when not eating or drinking.
  - Eat outside and spread far apart from each other. If not possible to eat outside, then spread out around the house more than 6 feet apart during mealtime.
  - If eating inside, eat in silence (maybe even have a silent game competition).
  - Outside of mealtime, if individuals are enjoying beverages, use straws inserted under the face mask.

# Meals

- Before and after preparing, serving, and eating food, use alcohol hand sanitizer or wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Wear a mask while preparing or serving food to others who don't live in your household.
- Limit the number of people who go in and out of areas where food is prepared or handled.
- Consider having only one individual serve the meal to avoid shared serving utensils and other contact.
- Limit gathering in the kitchen and in clean-up areas to only a few household members.
- Use single-serve condiments, utensils, plates and other items if at all possible. If not, have one person pour items like salad dressing or sanitize containers between use.
- Avoid any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets or buffet-style potlucks, salad bars, and condiment or drink stations.
- Consider single-use disposable utensils and dishware, such as paper plates, for serving and eating meals.
- Avoid food such as cheese platters, bowls with nuts or chips, and consider having individual appetizers or plates with a selection of appetizers for each person.

# Visitor/Guest Accommodations

- Consider hotels, rentals or other types of off-site accommodations away from your home.
- If guests must stay in your home, prepare sleeping areas and bathing accommodations separate from your family, and work out schedules for separate use of shared facilities.
- Ideally, bathrooms should not be shared. If they must be shared, leave cleaning wipes or sprays for cleaning the facilities between individuals, especially on high touch surfaces such as sink handles.
- Offer additional masks, hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies, paper towels, and single-use items (e.g., individual soaps, toiletries, wipes, etc.).
- Encourage your guests to help maintain and disinfect high-use surfaces. Individual bathing towels, hand towels, or paper hand towels should be made available.
- Open windows in the house to allow fresh air which can help with the quality of indoor ventilation.

# Other Considerations

- Avoid crowded grocery stores by shopping early, off-peak times, or ideally by using curbside or delivery options.
- When greeting friends and family, remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and minimize gestures, such as hugs or kisses that promote close contact.
- Blow out decorative candles after everyone has left the room to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 germs with your breath. Do not blow out candles on birthday cake or similar candles on shared food items.
- Discourage in person caroling this year due to the increase in droplets and aerosols produced by singing. Consider virtual caroling or reciting as an option. Host a Zoom caroling event or use other virtual options to spread holiday joy, but not COVID-19 viruses with family and friends.