

Bell County Public Health District – COVID-19 Holiday Guidance



Holidays and COVID-19: Why NOT to Gather

Aggressive social distancing efforts in Texas have been implemented for most of 2020 so far and, despite the pain and inconvenience of it we have seen a positive impact with regard to our COVID-19 numbers. As we enter the fall season and start to think toward the holiday season it may be tempting to travel and/or gather together, especially in light of the decreasing COVID-19 numbers locally, but please reconsider! COVID-19 is certainly still lingering in the area and it is possible to contract and spread it (even if you have already had it before), particularly if people are gathering or if you travel to other places.

Spreading the virus without knowing it is possible. The virus is thought to be spread mainly from person-to-person between people in close contact with one another (within 6 feet). People are thought to be most contagious when they are symptomatic (fever, cough, shortness of breath etc.), but people can still spread the virus without symptoms. The CDC reports that COVID-19 can be spread **up to 3 days** before symptoms present. Children in particular frequently do not have symptoms, but can still be contagious to other family members, and it sometimes is difficult for them to socially distance.

Visiting older family members or friends is particularly risky. If you must visit those who are over the age of 60 it is essential to follow infection transmission prevention guidelines such as:

- Wearing face masks,
- Washing hands before and after you visit,
- Using hand sanitizer,
- Maintaining at least 6 feet of distance when possible,
- Avoiding touching your face, and
- Avoiding visiting if exhibiting any symptoms of illness.

Even if you think your symptoms may be something else or are minor, please take extra care with those over 60 and avoid contact.

Avoid the risk of getting other family members sick. There are heartbreaking accounts of entire families falling ill (some severely so) after family gatherings. The very nature of a family gathering means being in close proximity to those you love for long periods of time. This virus can, and has been known, to easily spread in such a situations. **It is okay during this chaotic and unprecedented time to break social norms and stop gatherings.** We at BCPHD are practicing what we preach in this regard by not having our normal holiday employee gatherings. While it is sad to consider not spending this time together it is better and safer for everyone.

One of our largest concerns throughout this pandemic is overwhelming the healthcare system. By now you have heard the term “flattening the curve”. The idea is to spread out and reduce the number of cases over a longer period of time and we suspect that this virus may be around for a long time. It is easy to get fatigued and burnt out. However, as we enter the holiday season, we also enter flu season which could complicate this pandemic further.

Continuing to practice social distancing, masking, hand washing, staying home when sick and getting your flu vaccine are all things we can do to support our healthcare system and continue to “flatten the curve”.

Other Recommendations

Here are some ways to celebrate without gathering:

- Use social media or video conferencing. There are a lot of options out there including: Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp and Google Hangouts that will connect you with others in a safe way. If you haven't used one of these applications before, it's a good time to explore them and find one you like.
- Ideally, only gather with those in the same household as you.
- Attend faith services virtually. Many places of worship are offering this option.
- Coordinate your menu with those you celebrate with virtually ahead of time to make everyone feel more together

For community events:

- During times when COVID-19 is spreading readily ([see Threat Levels 1 & 2 on our dashboard](#)) we highly recommend against community events. Also, remember that for certain events you may have to get your City or the County to approve it beforehand. Please touch base with your City to determine what steps you need to take.
- If community events do take place:
 - Socially distance wherever possible
 - Use face coverings
 - Have hand washing stations or hand sanitizer available
 - Set the event to have single entry and exit points to keep traffic moving in one direction
 - Use social distancing markers to make things easier
 - Use signage if possible to educate participants about best practices
 - Recommend that those over 60, those with compromised immune systems, or those who are ill (even if they don't suspect COVID-19) do not participate
 - If a virtual attendance method is possible, make that available
 - If food is to be a part of the event, it should be served in single serving containers
 - Be creative with drive-through events or using large outdoor spaces when possible