



Keep the Holidays Healthy: Tips and Questions for Child Care Providers and Families

The phrase, 'extended family' is used often to describe how families feel about their child care provider or program. Families and providers have [rich relationships and shared goals](#) of health, stability and happiness for the children in child care. Keeping child care programs as COVID-19 free as possible is a big part of keeping children, families and providers healthy and well and minimizing the frequency of temporary program closures due to COVID-19 infections.

It's very important, more than ever, to be careful about holiday gatherings. With COVID-19 transmission rates reaching all-time highs this holiday season, one of the most loving things families can do is not to gather in person. This is especially important for those living outside of your household bubble who may fall in a [higher risk category](#), such as older adults and people with diabetes, obesity or heart conditions or those who smoke.

If you do have a family or friend gathering during the 2020 holiday season, take steps to make it as COVID-safe as possible. We offer these tips for the holidays, recognizing that each individual must consider the rules in your state about gathering size and location; individuals can find information on local rules and guidance from their [state and local public health departments](#).

Before the Gathering

Avoid the element of surprise. If you are hosting, communicate to family and friends your activities and risks for the 14 days leading up to your gathering so they can assess whether the risk for them is too great. If someone else is hosting, ask who will be at the gathering and from how many different households. Also ask if guests will be expected to wear face coverings and if there will be enough space for physical distancing during the gathering. Gatherings can be made safer if all who intend to gather with others outside of their household quarantine for 14 days leading up to the event. Make alternative plans if you feel like the risk of exposure to you and your loved ones is too great.

Keep It Small

Limit the number of people and households involved. Bringing different households together (such as 3 couples from different households or two couples, each with one child) is riskier than including 6 people from the same household. Even [small gatherings can result in an outbreak](#). If at all possible, consider a quaint gathering only with people with whom you have been staying together throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



Take It Outside

2020 is a year like no other where everyone has been pushed outside of their comfort zones to do things differently to manage exposure risk. If you do host guests, move gatherings outside, weather permitting. Make plans to allow plenty of room for physical distancing, especially when eating or drinking. Request that everyone wear a face and nose covering whenever feasible (e.g., at all times, except when eating).

Reduce Risk When Gathering Indoors

If you choose to gather indoors:

- Open windows to increase air circulation and air exchange.
- Limit the number of guests at one time or invite guests to arrive/depart in waves.
- Wear a face covering over your nose and mouth whenever possible and ask guests to do the same. Have extra disposable face masks on hand for guests who arrive without one.
- Limit utensil sharing, particularly when serving buffet or family-style. Alternatively, have designated servers who handle the utensils. Also consider having servers wear food service gloves.
- Use disposable service items such as paper plates and plastic silverware.
- Offer single-use condiment and dressing packets.
- Avoid having guests in and out of areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen.
- For added safety, ask guests to bring their own food, drinks, plates and utensils.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Make hand sanitizer readily available to guests.

Parents and providers are jointly responsible for healthy child care programs. Encourage conversations that help child care providers and families assess their respective risk for being exposed to COVID-19 during the holidays. These conversations can feel awkward. One way to frame a dialog is to use a strengths-based approach that captures the collective desire for everyone to stay healthy. Providers and families should be prepared to make their own judgements for temporarily excluding children from child care, based on their risk limit preferences. Providers will be better served by having a plan in place and sharing it with families. Similarly, families might consider their back up child care possibilities in case they determine that temporary alternative care is necessary. Here are some examples of questions families and providers may ask of each other.

Questions families may ask their child care provider:

- What precautions do you plan to take to reduce the risk of you and your family being exposed to COVID-19 during holiday gatherings? (e.g., wearing face coverings, physical distancing, small group size)
- Are you recommending that the families of children who have direct contact with my child when they are in child care and that who gather with non-household friends and family during the holidays either get tested or quarantine for 14 days before their child returns to child care?
- For family child care homes: Will you be hosting non-household guests in your home and will they have physical access to areas designated for child care?

Questions child care providers may ask families:

- Will you be traveling for the holidays to an area that has a high COVID-19 transmission rate or hosting family/friends coming from high COVID-19 transmission rate areas?
- What precautions do you plan to take to reduce the risk of you and your family being exposed to COVID-19 during holiday gatherings? (e.g., wearing face coverings, physical distancing, small group size)
- Do you plan to get COVID-19 testing for you and your family after each holiday gathering you attend with non-household members and before your child returns to the child care program?
- Do you plan for you and your family to quarantine for 14 days after your holiday gathering?

COVID-19 fatigue is at an all-time high but the pandemic will not last forever. Precautions taken during the 2020 holiday season can better ensure that our family members and loved ones are happy and healthy when therapies and immunization options become more widely available in 2021.



Last updated 12/21/2020