



Key Messages

Holiday gatherings and celebrations

Issue: Holiday gatherings and celebrations typically include indoor gatherings of families and friends, crowded parties, and travel, both domestic and international. During the holiday season, public health messaging will promote measures that Canadians can take to reduce their risk and prevent the spread of COVID-19 during holiday and religious celebrations. Mental health supports and resources will also be promoted. Advice should always be considered with the advice of local public health authorities rather than as a replacement.

Key Messages:

- The holidays are traditionally a time for Canadians to gather with family and friends near and far.
- This holiday season will be different, but we can still stay socially connected to one another even if we stay physically distant.
- You cannot eliminate all risks, but there are things you can do to reduce your risk, and the risk to your loved ones.
- Canadians should keep holiday gatherings and celebrations within their immediate household to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Celebrating with people outside your immediate household brings additional risk.
- Those who plan to gather with people outside their immediate household should:
 - check with the [local public health authority](#) to find out about gathering size limits and event cancellations
 - keep gatherings as small as possible
 - limit non-essential travel and activities 14 days prior to gathering to help reduce the risk of exposure
 - plan lower-risk activities, such as:
 - indoor celebrations with members of your immediate household
 - charity food drives and donations where organizers take appropriate precautions to reduce the risk of spread
 - virtual holiday and religious celebrations
 - drop-off or physically distanced doorstep gift exchanges
 - outdoor celebrations in open spaces where people can consistently maintain at least 2-metres physical distance
- No matter how you plan to celebrate the holiday season, show kindness and respect to others by maintaining a physical distance, wearing a non-medical mask, and staying home and away from others if you have symptoms of COVID-19.
- This advice for holiday gatherings and celebrations is to supplement, not replace, the advice of local public health authorities. Together, this advice provides Canadians with the resources they need to plan a safer holiday celebration.



On risk mitigation:

- No individual, and no family, faces the same set of circumstances.
- COVID-19 can result in more [severe disease or outcomes for some people in our communities](#). Before you host or attend an in-person holiday celebration or gathering, consider:
 - [your personal risk level](#)
 - the risk level of those in your household
 - the risk level of those you may have close contact with
- If you or a member of your household is at risk of more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19:
 - celebrate in-person with those in your immediate household
 - virtually connect with other family and friends who are not part of your household
- It's important to think about the risks associated with different situations, settings and holiday and religious celebrations. Take additional public health measures in:
 - **closed spaces** with poor ventilation
 - **crowded places** where many people are gathered
 - **close contact** settings and close-range conversations with those outside your immediate household
 - settings where there is singing, shouting or heavy breathing, for example, while dancing
- Give the gift of health this holiday season by:
 - maintaining physical distancing of 2-metres with people from outside of your immediate household
 - wearing a non-medical mask when you're in public and in shared indoor spaces with people from outside your immediate household
 - washing or sanitizing your hands often and practicing good hygiene
 - staying home and away from others if you have symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild
- Consider limiting non-essential travel and activities 14 days before attending planned gatherings or celebrations to help reduce your exposure to COVID-19, and the risk of exposing others to COVID-19.
 - This is particularly important if you plan to gather with people outside your immediate household. For example, those returning home for the holidays like university or college students.
- No matter your level of risk, follow public health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 this holiday season.



On holiday travel:

- Canadian citizens and permanent residents should avoid non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- If you must travel outside Canada during the holidays, check the latest [travel advice](#) before you leave to reduce your risk.
- Consider avoiding all non-essential trips within Canada, especially to areas that may have more COVID-19 spreading in communities.
- If you live in one of these areas, avoid traveling to gatherings or celebrations outside your community.
- If you [travel within Canada](#), there may be additional provincial, territorial and local public health measures at your final destination.
- Check with the public health authority at your final destination for more information on travel restrictions.
- If you must travel during the holidays, visit Canada.ca/travel to check the latest travel advice before you leave and learn how you can lower your risk.

On mental health:

- Feelings of stress are common during the holiday season and may be amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This holiday season you may be experiencing:
 - worry about finances and gift-giving
 - fear of getting sick with COVID-19 or of making others sick
 - family conflict resulting from differences in risk comfort level
 - sadness about breaking important family traditions or being away from loved ones
- Take care of your mental health. Start coping with your emotions early and acknowledge any negative emotions. These may be feelings of sadness or disappointment about missing a holiday celebrations or religious gathering.
- Know that it's okay to skip family gatherings to protect yourself, your family and your community.
- If you live alone, consider spending the holidays with another household.
- The outdoors has been a refuge for many during the pandemic. Canadians have been getting outside for exercise, lower-risk socializing, and positive mental health and well-being.
 - This can still be the case even in colder temperatures, as long as we continue practicing physical distancing and other public health measures.



- Part of our Canadian identity and spirit is braving the outdoors in the winter. Let's roll **down** our sleeves, put on our toques, mittens and masks, and keep COVID-19 outside of our homes.

- If you're in crisis, or need urgent medical support, call 911 or your local emergency help line. You can also get support from a local crisis centre, the Canada Suicide Prevention Service (1-833-456-4566), 1 866 APPELLE (Quebec residents) and @KidsHelpPhone.

- The Hope for Wellness Help Line (1-855-242-3310) offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous Peoples, including an online Chat Counselling Service: <https://hopeforwellness.ca>

- Canada.ca/Coronavirus has a wide range of immediate mental health and substance use resources and supports for Canadians, including the online [Wellness Together Canada portal](#). This portal can help those experiencing a range of common feelings like:
 - a sense of being socially excluded or judged
 - concern about your children's education and well-being
 - fear of getting sick with COVID-19 or of making others sick
 - worry about losing your job, not being able to work or finances
 - fear of being apart from loved ones due to isolation or physical distancing
 - new or increased desire to use alcohol or other substances.

