STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Department of Public Health Holiday Gathering Preparation Guidance

Connecticut has been a national leader in our COVID-19 response efforts. However, as the country heads into winter, flu season, and into holiday gatherings – the risk of spreading COVID-19 has become higher, and even Connecticut is seeing a spike in cases.

Several factors contribute to the holidays being a high-risk time to spread the virus, including:
- Traveling to communities with high concentration of COVID-19 cases;
- Gathering (indoors or outdoors) with friends and family outside of your local area;
- Participating in larger, longer gatherings;
- Traveling for long periods of time in enclosed spaces like buses or airplanes; and,
- Risky behavior like not wearing masks, or not social distancing around family members and close friends.

No matter how you celebrate – it's critical to **make a plan** to ensure that you keep yourself, and your family as safe as possible.

General Considerations

- If you feel sick, or have symptoms of COVID-19, please stay at home, do not participate in holiday gatherings, and get tested for COVID-19.
- Get a flu vaccine before the holidays.
- Consider limiting holiday dinners to your household and celebrating virtually (online) with people outside your household. *This is the best way to make sure you don't spread COVID-19 during the holidays.*
- If you have family members that live in long-term care facilities or other congregate settings, consider alternative virtual approaches to celebrating the holidays with them given the risks of infection. If you do choose to visit, follow basic public health guidelines, check with the facility before visits to ensure you're meeting their safety requirements, and consider getting tested within 72 hours prior to the visit
- If you are over 65 years old, or have medical conditions that place you at increased risk for COVID-19, avoid gatherings with people who are not in your immediate household
- Wear a mask, keep your distance, and wash your hands.

If you have decided to participate in an in-person gathering:

- Consider avoiding gatherings with people who are not in your immediate household, are over 65 years old, or have medical conditions that place them at increased risk for COVID-19.
- Keep gatherings with friends and family *small* and *outdoors*.

- When shopping, avoid crowds. Consider shopping online, using outside pick-up, or shops and stores that thoughtfully limit and manage crowds.
- Follow state and local travel and quarantine recommendations and requirements.

Remember Connecticut's Travel Advisory requirements:

- If you travel to a state covered under Connecticut's travel advisory, you are required to quarantine for 14 days or have a negative COVID-19 PCR test within 72 hours prior to arriving in Connecticut. **This will likely impact your work attendance, school attendance, or your children's school attendance after you return from holiday gatherings.**

Holiday Gatherings

If you're the host

If you are hosting a holiday event that includes people outside your household, consider:
- **Conduct pre-party screening:** Screen guests and ask them if they feel sick or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Ask your guests to stay home if they feel sick.
- **Limit attendance:** Fewer attendees will lower the risk of spreading virus.
- **Invite only local attendees:** Guests from other regions, especially areas with high COVID-19 cases, can pose increased risks.
- **Use outdoor spaces:** Hold activities, especially meals, outdoors if you can. If this is not possible, use an indoor space that is well ventilated and allows for physical distancing. If a gathering is being held indoors, opening windows and doors or use of portable air cleaners can reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- **Have personal protective equipment (PPE) available:** Provide masks, hand sanitizer, and tissues for guests who have not brought their own.
- **Use disposable items:** Single use plates, utensils, and to-go containers may limit the spread of COVID-19.
- **Ask for self-imposed pre-holiday social distancing:** Consider asking guests to adhere to safety principles by avoiding contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering to lower risks of virus spread.
- **Share safety guidelines:** Provide up-to-date COVID-19 safety information to guests and share all measures you have taken to limit risks.

If you're a guest

If you are attending holiday events that include people outside of your household, you may consider the following:
- **Events that use outdoor venues:** Attending gatherings held outdoors will pose a lower risk than indoor gatherings.
- **Local events:** Avoiding travel outside your community can lower infection risk.

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- **Bring PPE:** Bring your own mask, hand sanitizer, and tissues to help you and others stay healthy.
- **Avoid shared items:** Consider bringing single use utensils and cups (or your own items).
- **Prepare with social distancing:** Consider avoiding contact with people outside your household for 14 days before the gathering to lower the risk of virus spread.
- **Safety protocols:** Ask the host about up-to-date COVID-19 safety information and protocols that have been taken to lower risks for the gathering in their area. You should also seek out this information yourself to ensure you're prepared to travel.

Travel

The basics

Traveling is a high-risk activity. Staying at home during the holidays is the best way to keep yourself and others healthy. If you decide to travel to locations outside of your local area, you should consider the following:
- You are required to quarantine for 14 days or to have a negative COVID-19 PCR result within 72 hours prior to arriving in Connecticut if you are coming from a state under Connecticut's travel advisory.
- Travel can increase your risk of infecting others or being infected with COVID-19.

Consider avoiding, or delaying travel if:

- Your destination (including within Connecticut) has travel restrictions that apply to you, or has an increase in COVID-19 cases;
- You are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms (for example, fever, respiratory symptoms, loss of taste or smell);
- You have been around anyone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days;
- Someone you plan to travel with is sick; or,
- You live with someone who may be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (travel may increase the risk of infection for a vulnerable person).

Make a plan before and after travel

If you decide you must travel for the holidays, plan and adhere to safety guidelines to reduce risks:
- Monitor your health for COVID-19 symptoms, and avoid travel if you are experiencing symptoms.
- Check the status of COVID-19 cases in your current location, at your destination, and any areas you are traveling though. COVID-19 cases and transmission trends can be tracked in Connecticut and across the US.
- Check Connecticut Travel Advisory restrictions, and the CDC travel recommendations before your trip.

- If you are traveling from an area that does not have an increase in cases or that is under a public health alert, you should still consider having a COVID-19 PCR test within 72 hours upon arrival to Connecticut, and quarantine until the test result is received. *Remember, if you believe you have been exposed to COVID-19, you should quarantine for 14 days from the day of exposure.*

Returning Home After a Holiday Gathering

Take extra precautions for 14 days after returning home if you participated in high-risk activities or think you may have been in contact with a COVID-19 infected person during your holiday gathering, or travel time. You should consider the following:
- Avoid contact with people at high risk for COVID-19 infection.
- If you are returning from a state that is part of Connecticut's travel advisory, you must quarantine for 14 days, or have a negative test result within 72 hours prior to your return.
- Please consider quarantine for 14 days or receive a negative COVID-19 PCR test within 72 hours if you are traveling from a state that is not a part of Connecticut's travel advisory.
- If you test positive after your holiday gathering, contact the host of the gathering and other attendees. You should also contact your health care provider, and follow the CDC guidance about what to do if your symptoms get worse.
- Monitor your health for COVID-19 symptoms. If you develop symptoms, contact the host of the gathering and other attendees. You should also contact your health care provider and follow CDC guidance on what to do if your symptoms worsen.

Students

*Considerations for University, College, and High School Boarding Students **Visiting Connecticut for the Holidays***
- Check the status of COVID-19 cases in the campus area, your destination in Connecticut, any areas through you will travel though, and travel restrictions or requirements for testing, stay-at-home orders, or quarantine.
- Consider getting the flu (influenza) vaccination before traveling.
- Limit contact to people in your household, residence hall, or "pod" for 14 days before travelling.
- If you are traveling from a state that requires it under Connecticut's travel advisory, you must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Connecticut. You may test out this mandatory quarantine by obtaining a negative COVID-19 PCR test 72 hours prior to arrival or by having a negative test after arrival. *You must quarantine until the negative test result is received.*
- If you are traveling from an area not affected by Connecticut's travel advisory, consider taking a COVID-19 PCR test and only travel if the result is negative. Consider limiting contact to people in your household for 14 days once back in CT.
- Avoid contact with vulnerable family members for 14 days after arriving home prior to your holiday gathering.

*Considerations for University, College, and High School Boarding Students **Returning to Campus in Connecticut** after the Holiday Season*

In addition to following guidance and travel requirements from each school, student should consider the following:

- If you travel to a state covered under Connecticut's travel advisory, you are required to quarantine for 14 days or have a negative COVID-19 PCR test within 72 prior to arriving in Connecticut. You must quarantine until the negative test result is received.
- If you are traveling from a state not covered under Connecticut's travel advisory, consider taking a COVID-19 PCR test and only travel if the result is negative. Consider limiting contact to people in your household, residence hall, or "pod" for 14 days after you are back in Connecticut.
- Do not participate in in-person classes if you are feeling sick; take part in classes online.

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