



News Release

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Media contact: [Public Information Desk](#)

Public inquiries: State COVID-19 Assistance Hotline, 1-800-525-0127 then press #

COVID-19 reminders during the holiday season

How to say no to gatherings, contact tracing effort continues

OLYMPIA – As we get closer to the holidays, a time normally spent with loved ones, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) would like to remind everyone about safer ways to spend time together this year.

As the pandemic goes on, it may feel harder than ever to pass up the opportunity to gather with family or friends. But since gathering with those outside your household is still unsafe, and disease transmission is still high, knowing how – and when – to say no is the first step to protecting your health and the health of the people you care about.

“There are several ways to do this politely and kindly,” says behavioral health psychologist Dr. Kira Mauseth, about declining an invitation to gather. “Saying no effectively starts with just that – saying no. A simple, direct response is the best way to make yourself understood and closes the door for negotiations. Offer alternatives, be honest, don’t feel pressured to keep the conversation going, and show them the facts if they have questions.”

“Gathering right now is a dangerous choice, even though it feels like the right choice right now, for so many reasons,” says Lacy Fehrenbach, deputy secretary of health for COVID-19 response at DOH. “We all feel that, but it’s just not safe at this time. There is hope for more in-person connection later in 2021, but we aren’t there yet.”

“It’s never too late to make a good choice,” adds Dr. Mauseth, “even though that choice might feel hard right now.”

While it is still important to limit holiday celebrations to only members of your immediate households, you can still plan on safer activities like:

- Organizing online holiday gatherings, contests (cookie decorating, gingerbread houses, etc.), holiday movie watch party
- Dropping off gifts or treats for friends and family at their doorsteps
- Outdoor activities like holiday hikes, snowball fights, sledding, snowshoeing. If done with members outside your household, wear a mask, keep your distance, and keep it small.

You can find more ideas in our [winter holiday guidance here](#).

We are also asking people not to seek screening tests in order to attend winter holiday celebrations. We want to ensure testing access for those with COVID-like symptoms or confirmed close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Another reminder: Public health case investigators and contact tracers work seven days a week to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. That includes holidays. If you receive a call or text from public health this holiday season, please answer. Case investigation and contact tracing helps public health track outbreaks and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

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