



Winter Holiday and Celebration Guidance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

November 30, 2020

As the weather gets colder and families make plans to celebrate the winter holidays, extra precautions must be taken to mitigate the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Such precautions are especially critical given that New Jersey is experiencing a “second wave” of coronavirus cases throughout the State. The following recommendations have been developed to help individuals safely and responsibly celebrate the holiday season during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Gatherings must comply with current indoor and outdoor limits.

Gatherings and Holiday Celebrations

As a general rule, limiting family gatherings to include only immediate household members is the safest way to celebrate in-person. Additionally, using technology to live stream and visit with others outside of the immediate household is a safer alternative to attending in-person events, especially events that are held indoors.

- Gatherings:
 - If possible, limit indoor gatherings to individuals that reside within the immediate household for all seasonal holiday celebrations, including (but not limited to) Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Saint Nicholas Day, Las Posadas, Winter Solstice, Pancha Ganapati, and New Year’s Eve.
 - Consider live streaming celebrations/events so they may be viewed safely by others.
 - As COVID-19 cases increase, NJDOH encourages all to download the COVID Alert NJ exposure app.
- Tree lightings, menorah lightings, and other holiday gatherings should be held outdoors.
- Persons who have been told to quarantine or isolate should not attend any gathering, regardless of whether it is held indoors or outdoors. They should complete the recommended period of time for the quarantine/isolation to protect others.
 - This includes persons who are awaiting test results. Persons who are tested should quarantine away from others until they receive their test results.
 - Do not host or attend gatherings with anyone who has COVID-19 or anyone who has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- If hosting a small holiday gathering:

- Small gatherings should be limited to immediate household members, as much as possible. Current indoor gathering limits are no more than 10 persons, with limited exceptions outlined in Executive Order No. 196.
- Utilize single-use serving ware to the extent possible (e.g., cups, plates, utensils, etc.). Otherwise, limit the number of people who touch common items such as serving utensils and barware.
- Make sure everyone washes their hands before preparing, serving, and/or eating food.
- Make hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) available for all to use.
- Avoid buffets and self-serve drink stations.
- Use no-touch trash cans if possible.
- Seating arrangements should encourage social distancing by maintaining 6 feet between individuals who are not in the same household. This may include sitting at multiple tables spread throughout the home.
- Guests should wear masks when not eating and drinking.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces and areas often.
 - Provide disinfecting wipes in the bathroom for guests to wipe down toilet handles, faucet knobs/handles, and doorknobs.
 - Make sure each bathroom has soap.
 - Consider single-use hand towels instead of cloth towels in the bathroom(s).

Additional Recommendations for Holiday Celebrations

- Holiday parades are discouraged.
 - If holiday parades are organized, consider limiting in-person attendance and instead having the parade live-streamed so the public can view it virtually.
 - Parades must abide by the current limits on outdoor gatherings.
 - Parades should observe social distancing and all participants should wear masks. Organizers should designate areas for spectators to view the parade with markings on the ground to facilitate social distancing.
 - To encourage social distancing, consider using open-top vehicles and floats instead of having individuals march in large groups.
 - Parade organizers must maintain a list of all participants' names and phone numbers, for possible contact tracing. This list shall be turned over to the local health department to assist with contact tracing.
 - Parade participants should not be permitted to throw items from their floats or cars to spectators.
- As an alternative to a traditional Santa route, consider having Santa ride around neighborhoods in an open-top vehicle so he can wave to spectators. Spectators should stay in their homes or within their yards/sidewalks. Neighborhoods should be notified of the time that Santa will arrive to avoid potential clustering of spectators in anticipation of the event. Santa should not be permitted to throw or toss items from the vehicle.

Mall and Indoor Santa Visits

In order to keep families, children and employees safe this holiday season, it is strongly recommended that people consider alternatives to visiting Santa at indoor locations including malls, churches, stores, etc. to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure/transmission.

- As a safer alternative, consider virtual visits or outdoor socially distanced visits with Santa.
- If malls and other indoor locations still chose to offer in-person visits with Santa, it should be a “touchless” experience.
 - Santa, staff, and guests should practice social distancing and must wear cloth or disposable masks at all times. Guests under the age of two are not required to wear a mask.
 - Visits should be limited in time to reduce interactions between people.
 - Reservations should be made in advance of in-person visits to discourage crowding around the Santa display area and to provide adequate time between guests for cleaning and sanitizing any high-touch surfaces.
 - Guests should not arrive early for their appointment.
 - Guests without reservations should be turned away and should not be permitted to take pictures. They should not be permitted to wait around to see if an opening becomes available.
 - Children should not be permitted to sit on Santa’s lap at any time.
 - Santa may be stationed in a chair behind a plexiglass shield in an open area to allow for good air flow.
 - If using a plexiglass shield, it should be compliant with fire safety and building code requirements and should be high enough to stand above the tallest seated person at the event.
 - The organizer should ensure that there are markings on the floor at least 6 feet apart to promote social distancing in and around the Santa display area.
 - Decorative enclosed structures, such as Santa’s workshop, are not recommended, as these limit air flow.
 - No food (i.e., food, gifts, treats) should be handed out by Santa or staff.
 - Hand hygiene should be practiced regularly by both Santa and staff.
 - Hand sanitizer should be available at the Santa display area for staff and guests.
 - Santa, staff, and guests experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not participate in the event.
 - Anyone (staff and guests) told to quarantine or isolate should not report to work/the mall until the end of the quarantine/isolation period.

Choirs and Caroling

Because it is a high-risk activity, singing poses an increased risk for transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Accordingly, it is recommended that individuals consider virtual signing events whenever possible. To the extent that in-person events are held, the following safeguards be in place for choirs and caroling this holiday season. The virus may be transmitted via singing even if performers do not have symptoms.

Large performances have the potential to be super spreader events. Avoiding large gatherings, increasing the physical distance between performers and distance from the audience, as well as wearing masks are simple ways to protect performers and their audiences.

- Performances must adhere to the latest limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings in NJ.
- Singing groups must be socially distanced from each other and from their audience during each performance. Singing groups that perform in public must be at least 10 feet away from others or have a physical barrier between them and the audience
 - Audiences may be indoors or outdoors
 - Outdoor performances are recommended over indoor performances.
- Performers and guests must wear cloth or disposable masks. Musicians playing brass or woodwind instruments that require use of their mouth must wear a mask when not actively playing their instruments.
- Organizers of a scheduled singing event must conduct health checks for all live performers prior to the event. Any performer who (1) is showing symptoms of COVID-19, (2) who was exposed to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, or (3) who was told to isolate or quarantine, should not be permitted to perform.
- Locations for indoor performances should not include places where there are cases among high-risk or vulnerable populations (e.g., long term care facilities).
 - Certain facilities may be subject to additional restrictions. For example, Long Term Care facilities that are currently experiencing an outbreak or have had an outbreak within the last 14 days may not invite performers for indoor performances.
 - Performers may sing outdoors where they may be seen/heard from inside the facility.

Holiday Travel

- Travel outside of your home should be limited.
- As airports, bus stations, train stations, public transportation and rest stops are all places where travelers can be exposed to COVID-19, it is recommended that non-essential travel be limited this holiday season.
- Instead of traveling, it is recommended that you stay home and connect with family and friends via video conferencing technology, such as FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, or Google Meetings.

Winter holiday villages/flea markets/stores

- All vendors and organizers should observe social distancing and place markings on the ground to promote social distancing among shoppers.

- Masks must be worn by all (staff, sellers, shoppers).
- Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be made available at multiple stations.
- Consider offering reservations for limited numbers of individuals per time slot. This will help reduce crowds.
- Winter holiday villages/flea markets should be held outdoors, when possible.
- Consider offering sidewalk shopping outside of stores to minimize the number of indoor shoppers. Stores may set up tables and racks outdoors, weather permitting.
- Outdoor food stands must observe current outdoor dining guidance