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Florida Department of Health Offers Tips for a Safe and Healthy Holiday Season



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Port Charlotte, Fla. — As Floridians prepare to celebrate the holidays with family and friends, it's important for residents and visitors to take precautions to keep everyone safe. According to the United States Census Bureau, just over 40% of Charlotte County is over the age of 65. With that in mind, Joseph Pepe, Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County, states, "It's the time of year of giving, helping others, and celebrating with loved ones. Be kind to one another, give your time to others and, please celebrate safely this holiday season, not only for yourself, but for those around you as well."

The Florida Department of Health (Department) is actively planning for the distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine, making it more important than ever for Floridians to take precautions in their everyday life to mitigate the spread of the virus. This holiday season, the Department offers these health and safety recommendations.

Protecting Yourself from COVID-19 During Gatherings and Celebrations

- All individuals should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- If someone feels ill during the holiday season, get tested for COVID-19 and avoid going out in public or being around at-risk individuals.
- Older adults or persons with certain medical conditions who are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or live or work with someone at increased risk of severe illness, should avoid in-person gatherings with people who do not live in their household.
- Consider hosting an outdoor gathering rather than an indoor gathering.
- Guests who have traveled from other areas or towns should distance themselves from people who are 65 or older and people of any age who have underlying health issues such as lung or heart disease.

- Hosts entertaining at home should make sure frequently touched surfaces are cleaned and disinfected before and after gatherings.

Flu Vaccination

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that everyone six months and older get a flu vaccine every year. For more information: [com](#).
- People should be vaccinated at least two weeks before traveling because it can take a few weeks for vaccine immunity to develop.
- Flu vaccines are offered at health care providers' offices, clinics, county health departments, pharmacies, schools and college health centers: [org](#).

Holiday Travel

- People who are sick should not travel—even if symptoms are mild, infection can spread to others.
- Everyone traveling by car should wear seat belts and adults should check that infant and child car seats are properly installed.
- If you are traveling from Florida to another state on a commercial flight, wear a mask and social distance as much as possible. If you feel ill upon return, get tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Food Safety

- Handwashing with soap and water for 20 seconds (or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol) before and after preparing, serving and eating food is key to food safety.
- Frozen turkeys can defrost at a safe temperature using one of these methods: in a leak-proof container in the refrigerator; in a leak-proof plastic bag in a sink of cold water (water should be changed every 30 minutes), or in the microwave, following the microwave manufacturer's instructions. Never defrost meat at room temperature.
- Cross contamination of foods causes illness—separate utensils, cutting boards and plates used for raw meats from other foods.
- Food thermometers are the best way to confirm that a food is cooked to a safe temperature.
- Hot foods should be kept hot and cold foods cold.
- Leftovers should be refrigerated within two hours of eating.

Fire Prevention

- Fireplaces, space heaters, candles and food cooking on stoves or ovens should not be left unattended.
- A clearance of 3 feet kept around heat sources—fireplaces, air vents, space heaters—is safer.
- The manufacturers' instructions for connecting Christmas light strands should be followed.
- Christmas trees should be watered daily—dry pine needles are fire hazards.

Injury Prevention

- Carbon monoxide poisoning is 100% preventable—generators, grills or other gasoline or charcoal-burning devices should not be used inside the home or garage.
- Step stools or ladders that are locked and placed on a level surface should be used when hanging decorations.
- Fireworks are safety hazards that can burn people and houses, and terrify pets—the safer choice is to exclude fireworks from celebrations.
- Bicycle or skateboarding helmets help prevent the most serious types of head and brain injuries.

Healthy Habits for the Holidays

- Smaller servings of favorite foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar can be balanced with healthier options like lean meats, whole grains, vegetables and fruits.
- Physical activity helps keep weight in check during the holidays: adults should be active for at least 2½ hours a week, and at least 1 hour a day is ideal for children and teens.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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