

Should you have Thanksgiving in person this year? By: [Michelle Schuerman](#)

The smells and sounds of Thanksgiving traditions may be a little unconventional this holiday season.

Because the number of coronavirus cases continues to rise in Wisconsin, Illinois and elsewhere and the risk of exposure is higher indoors, experts are encouraging families to consider alternative options for this annual holiday feast.

“Gathering with family over the holidays can be one of the most highly-anticipated and welcomed events of the year,” says Dr. Julia Hester-Diaz, vice president of the primary care service line for Advocate Aurora Health. “When planning any holiday gathering this year, please consider your and your family’s health needs and varying levels of risk to coronavirus exposure. It is important to not only prepare the meal, but also prepare the right safety measures to eliminate the spread of germs this cold, flu and COVID season.”

This year, the Centers for Disease Control shared their holiday celebration recommendations, which range from building safety measures into family gatherings to offering virtual options to commemorate this national holiday. This change of course could very well spark a new holiday tradition for your feast. Consider a virtual turkey cook-off or pie decorating contest, or even a distanced dessert drop-off giving families a safe and creative way to see each other this Thanksgiving. Or this can be the year the family runs or walks in their community’s 5K Turkey Trot to benefit a local charity or share their blessings with a gift to a local meal program.

If you are planning to gather in-person for Thanksgiving, here are a few safety recommendations:

- Limit the number of people invited, and the time spent in close proximity. Invite everyone to wear a mask when indoors and within six feet of each other.
- Arrange your seating and gathering areas six feet apart, and seat immediate family members together for the meal. Everyone gets to sit at the kid’s table this year.
- Encourage outdoor gatherings by building an experience with tents, lighting or warmers/fire pits.
- Place hand sanitizer, hand soaps and disposable towels in the main areas of the home.
- For the person cutting the turkey, this is the year to ensure your guests are practicing good hygiene and limiting their exposure to where the food is being prepared and served.

Whether you choose an in-person or virtual event this year, you may experience hard or controversial conversations with your guests and loved ones. Clinicians encourage you to set realistic expectations for guest attendance, including asking anyone who isn’t feeling well or was potentially exposed to COVID-19 to respectfully stay home or join the virtual offering. Also, for those planning to join an in-person event, consider practicing strict social distancing and masking with anyone outside of your household for 14 days prior to your celebration date.

“In these times of uncertainty and change, it is most important to keep our loved ones safe, especially our most vulnerable populations, including parents and grandparents over the age of 65,” says Dr. Hester-Diaz. “With compassion and respect, I encourage families to take extra care to keep everyone safe and minimize illness this holiday season.” Adapted from Health eNews, 11/4/18

Wishing you joy and good health,
Mary Bohlen RN