



Southeastern Idaho Public Health

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Southeastern Idaho Public Health Urges People to Find Safer Ways to Celebrate Thanksgiving

The holidays will look remarkably different this year due to COVID-19. Months into the global pandemic, we continue to see how family gatherings are often responsible for spreading the virus, sometimes with fatal consequences. Unfortunately, that means making major adjustments to our holiday traditions if we want to protect grandma, grandpa and other vulnerable relatives.

Southeastern Idaho Public Health (SIPH) wants its communities to be aware that many traditional activities, such as in-person gatherings with people outside of your household, and travel to areas outside of your home county, greatly increase risk for exposure to COVID-19 and spreading viruses during the holidays. “It’s really clear that family gatherings often become super-spreader events. That’s because people mistakenly assume they’re safe with trusted relatives and then don’t wear masks or practice social distancing,” said Maggie Mann, SIPH Executive Director. “But that doesn’t mean we have to skip the holidays completely. We encourage people to consider carefully what’s right for you and your loved ones. For many people, that may mean creating new, smaller (and safer) traditions for this year.”

SIPH reminds southeast Idaho residents that the governors “Stay Healthy Order” places limits on social events, like a Thanksgiving gathering, to 10 or fewer people. The safest, no-risk way to celebrate the holidays is to do so only with members of your household. Consider these low-risk holiday activities:

- Having a small Thanksgiving dinner with only your household members
- Preparing traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and delivering them in a way that doesn’t involve contact with others
- Hosting a virtual dinner with your extended friends and family using video technology
- Playing virtual games with family and friends
- Watching sporting events, parades, movies, and holiday programs at home with your household members
- Shopping for Black Friday or Cyber Monday deals online – follow your local retailers on social media to shop local

While SIPH recommends that people do not hold gatherings with those outside of their household, or travel this year, we are providing some guidance and safety considerations for those who are considering these higher-risk activities.

If you are planning to invite people outside your household to a gathering, there are ways to gather and reduce the risk. “We implore you to follow the guidelines and wear a mask, stay 6 feet apart, wash your hands

often, and stay home if you are experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms,” said Mann. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has [several tips for how to gather safely](#) for the holidays, including these:

- Host outdoor activities rather than indoor activities as much as possible. If hosting an outdoor event is not possible, and you choose to host an indoor event, avoid crowded, poorly ventilated, or fully enclosed indoor spaces.
- Increase ventilation by opening windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather.
- Host activities with only people from your local area as much as possible.
- Limit numbers of attendees as much as possible.
- Provide updated information to your guests about any COVID-19 safety guidelines and steps in place to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Provide or encourage attendees to bring supplies to help you and others stay healthy. For example, extra masks (do not share or swap with others), hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, and tissues.
- If you are planning in-person holiday gatherings with people outside of your household, consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.

“If you really want to safely celebrate the holidays, you’ll need to figure out how to avoid travel and large gatherings entirely while still weaving in traditions you know and love,” said Mann. “It’s not going to be easy for many of us, but these are only temporary sacrifices to protect our community and those we care most about.”

No matter what your plans are for celebrating the holidays, SIPH urges everyone to do the following:

- Get your flu vaccine; remember, it takes up to 2 weeks for a flu vaccine to provide protection
- Consistently follow local public health orders in place and Idaho’s Stage 2 Stay Healthy Order
- Wear face coverings
- Keep at least six feet between you and others
- Stay home if you are sick
- Take time to care for your mental health
- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Disinfect surfaces and objects regularly

For southeast Idaho specific information about the novel coronavirus, please visit <https://siphidaho.org/coronavirus.php>.

For Idaho-specific information about the novel coronavirus, please visit <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>.

Join us Monday-Friday at 11 am for Facebook Live at <https://facebook.com/siphidaho>.

SIPH has a COVID Hotline to field questions from the community and is open Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can reach the hotline at (208) 234-5875.