



Interim Guidance for Private Social Gatherings

(November 23, 2020)

Guidelines for Private Social Gatherings: Any scenario in which people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. This includes private social gatherings in North Carolina such as cookouts or holiday gatherings. This guidance is intended for hosts and guests of private gatherings. The guidance below will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in communities.

The Basics

- Do not host or attend a gathering if:
 - You have been diagnosed with COVID-19
 - You are waiting for COVID-19 test results
 - You are experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19
 - You have been told by the local health department to quarantine or isolate, or
 - You may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19
- No gathering should exceed current Mass Gathering Limits (10 people indoors and 50 people outdoors). Gatherings above these limits are currently prohibited statewide to slow the spread of COVID-19. However, the virus can be spread in smaller gatherings as well.
- When deciding how many people to invite to your gathering, consider the amount of space you have and the ability to maintain social distancing during the event.
- People at high risk of complications for COVID-19 (e.g., people over 65 years of age or with underlying chronic conditions) should avoid social gatherings. If they do attend, ensure the 3Ws are practiced.
- Consider hosting virtual events or having a virtual option for individuals that are higher risk to join safely from their home.
- Outdoor activities are preferred over indoor because it is easier to stay apart and there is more wind and air to help reduce the spread of the virus. However, even in outdoor settings, the more people that interact increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Practice the [3 Ws \(Wear, Wait, Wash\)](#) during the event: Wear a face covering, Wait six feet apart from others, and Wash your hands regularly.
 - Remember that face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with, including visiting someone else's house or when you are having guests over at your own home. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members.
- Anyone who develops COVID-19 within 48 hours after attending a gathering should notify other attendees as soon as possible regarding the potential exposure.

Hosting a Social Gathering

Remind guests to stay home if they are sick

- Remind invited guests to stay home if they have been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#).

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- Consider keeping a list of guests who attended for potential future [contract tracing](#) needs. Encourage guests to download the [SlowCOVIDNC](#) Exposure Notification App.
- Tell your guests what steps you are taking to make sure your gathering is as safe as possible.
- 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.

Encourage social distancing

- Host your gathering outdoors, when possible. If this is not feasible, make sure the room or space is well-ventilated by opening windows and doors to the extent that is safe and feasible based on the weather.
- Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing. People from the same household can be in groups together and do not need to be 6 feet apart – just 6 feet away from other groups or families.
- If planning activities for adults and/or kids, consider those where social distancing can be maintained, like sidewalk chalk art, corn hole, or frisbee.
- When guests arrive, minimize gestures that promote close contact. For example, rather than shaking hands or giving hugs, wave and verbally greet guests.
- Be mindful of serving alcohol, as guests are less likely to follow social distancing practices when drinking.

Wear cloth face coverings

- Face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with, including visiting someone else's house or when you are having guests over at your own home. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members
- Consider providing cloth face coverings for guests or asking them to bring their own.

Clean hands often

- Consider providing hand sanitizer in addition to clearly marked hand washing areas.
- [Wash your hands](#) for at least 20 seconds when entering and exiting social gatherings. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Make sure there is adequate soap or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, paper towels, and tissues available in the restrooms and encourage guests not to form a line at the door. Consider also providing cleaning supplies that allow guests to wipe down surfaces before they leave. Remove shared/communal hand towels.
- Remind guests to wash their hands before serving or eating food.
- Use single-use hand towels or paper towels for drying hands so guests do not share a towel.

Limit the number of people handling or serving food

- Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks.
- Limit people going in and out of the areas where food is being prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen or around the grill, if possible. Have one household approach the food serving area at a time to prevent congregating.
- If serving any food, consider identifying one person to serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
Use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, and condiments, so that multiple people are not handling the items.

Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items

- [Clean and disinfect](#) commonly touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, sink handles, bathroom surfaces) before guests come over and between uses.
- Clean and disinfect any shared items between use when feasible.
- Use touchless garbage cans or pails or take lids off garbage cans to decrease the number of items touched.
- Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. [Wash your hands](#) after removing gloves.
- If you choose to use any shared items that are reusable (e.g., seating covers, tablecloths, linen napkins), wash, clean, and sanitize them after the event.

Attending a Social Gathering

Prepare before you go

- Stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, if you are waiting for COVID-19 test results, are experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, been told by the local health department to quarantine or isolate, or think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
 - Invited guests who live with [those at higher risk](#) should also consider the potential risk to their loved ones or others who live in their household.
- Check with the host for updated information about any COVID-19 safety guidelines and if they [have steps in place](#) to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Prioritize attending outdoor activities over indoor activities and stay within your local area as much as possible.
- Bring supplies to help you and others stay healthy—for example, [cloth face coverings](#) (bring extra), hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, and drinking water.
- If you are planning to attend in-person holiday gatherings with people outside of your household, consider strictly avoiding contact with people outside of your household for 14 days before the gathering.
- Get your flu shot prior to visiting friends and family during the flu season. Flu season begins in October and often peaks in the winter months, so the time to get your flu shot is now. Allow about 2 weeks for the flu shot to be active in protection.

Use social distancing and limit physical contact

- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet or more from people who do not live in your household. Be particularly mindful in areas where it may be harder to keep this distance, such as parking areas and routes of entry and exit.
- Select seating or determine where to stand based on the ability to keep 6 feet of space from people who do not live in your household, including if you will be eating or drinking.
- Arrive to the gatherings early or at off-peak times to avoid crowding and congested areas.
- Avoid forming a line at the restroom door or using the restroom at high traffic times, such as at the end of the gathering.
- Be mindful of drinking alcohol, as this can impact your ability to follow social distancing practices.

Wear cloth face coverings

- Wear a [cloth face covering](#) when interacting with other people to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.

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- Remember that face coverings are required indoors when you are with individuals who you do not live with, including visiting someone else’s house or when you are having guests over at your own home. Face coverings must also be worn outside if you cannot consistently maintain 6ft of distance apart from non-household members.
- Cloth face coverings are strongly encouraged in settings where individuals might raise their voices, such as shouting, chanting, or singing. These are activities that increase the release of respiratory droplets and fine aerosols into the air and pose higher risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- If guests need to remove a face covering to eat or drink, it is recommended they maintain 6 feet distance from people outside their household and put their face coverings back on after they are done eating or drinking.

Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items

- Use paper towels instead of a communal/shared hand towel. Use touchless garbage cans or pails.
- Use cashless payment options when possible.
- Avoid any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets and condiment or drink stations.
- Use disposable food service items including utensils and dishes, if available, or consider bringing your own dishes and utensils.
- [Wash your hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer immediately before eating food or after touching any common surfaces like door handles and toilets

Considerations for higher risk individuals

- People at high risk of complications for COVID-19 should avoid social gatherings.
 - High risk individuals include people over the age of 65 or have certain [medical conditions](#).
- Higher risk guests should consider attending events virtually, so they can remain safely at home.
- If higher risk individuals do attend gatherings in person, ensure the 3Ws are practiced by all guests and limit the number of other guests in attendance as much as possible.
- Consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.