

Think 'virtual' for family gatherings during the holidays

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thanksgiving feast

(HealthDay)—Virtual gatherings are the best choice for family get-togethers this holiday season, an expert says.

That's the safest approach during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for older loved ones and those with underlying conditions, according to Dr. Glenn Buchberger, an internist and pediatrician at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, Pa.

"We just have to think that being apart is a loving, caring decision we make," he said in a hospital news release.

If families are willing to accept some risk and really want to be together, the best approach is a strict 14-day quarantine ahead of the [gathering](#), Buchberger said.

People who haven't quarantined shouldn't attend, especially if there's a large group.

People who are traveling should take their own car if possible, instead of flying or taking a bus. While airlines say they can keep air purified and have strict cleaning protocols, that may not be enough protection, Buchberger said. Being around other people or touching surfaces in an airport could put you at risk of infection, even if other travelers are wearing masks.

Try to keep [family gatherings](#) small and hold them outdoors or even in a garage with the door open, Buchberger advised.

Don't rely on air purifiers. While they may provide some help, they won't fully protect people in the same room with someone infected with the new [coronavirus](#).

It's also important to know that a COVID-19 test before a [family](#) gathering can give a false sense of security. A negative test result doesn't always mean a person doesn't have the virus—it just means they're not shedding enough virus to show up on the [test](#), Buchberger explained.

"The positive of all of this is we do know how to prevent this thing," he said. "We know that being apart and wearing masks work."

More information: For more on COVID-19, go to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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