

Create a social bubble, stay safe over the holidays

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The holiday season is traditionally a time for family and friends to gather together and celebrate. But the COVID-19 pandemic will make the holidays a much different experience for many Americans.

Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a Mayo Clinic pediatric infectious diseases specialist, says participating in virtual events and limiting your gatherings to only those who live in your household will be the safest ways to celebrate during the upcoming holiday season. She recommends that anyone who is planning to celebrate the holidays with people from outside of their households consider the concept of a social bubble. It's a way to expand your social interactions beyond household family members while reducing the risk of getting infected with, or spreading, COVID-19.

A social bubble refers to having a small, clearly defined group of people that agree to limit their close social contacts to only those within the bubble. Everyone is aware they are part of the bubble, and they agree to minimize close social contact with people outside of the bubble.

Also, everyone within the bubble commits to

following the recommendations related to physical distancing, wearing a mask in public, and hand-washing in their daily lives to reduce the risk of exposing others within their bubble.

Limiting your bubble to less than about 10 people or two to three families will make it easier to manage your bubble, communicate with each other and minimize your risks. The larger your bubble, the higher your risk will be. It is important to choose people you trust to follow the recommended precautions, and communicate openly and honestly if someone becomes sick or is exposed to COVID-19—and of course that you enjoy spending time with.

"We all need to be really thoughtful about how we approach this season in order to keep everyone as healthy as possible. This is where the recommendation regarding a social bubble will be helpful," says Dr. Rajapakse. "And I encourage anyone who hasn't thought about this concept or implemented it into their family's plan to think about it for the upcoming [holiday season](#)."

She says the social bubble can reduce the risk of transmission of infection to people within your bubble if everyone carefully follows the rules. And if someone were to become ill, it makes it easier to define who may have been exposed. But it takes some planning. You should have important conversations with the people that you're considering to let into your bubble and ongoing communication about everyone's health and well-being. It is important to discuss with your family how to minimize everyone's risk of exposure.

Instead of gathering closely together around the dinner table, as you normally would, spread out. Hold celebrations outdoors, if possible. Consider a hike or family walk as the "main event" with everyone masked.

As a lower risk alternative to in-person gatherings,

connect with friends and [family](#) by phone or by using online technology such as Zoom. Plug your mobile device into your TV or put your computer at the end of the table to "share across the miles." Order dessert for yourself and long distance loved ones and savor each bite together.

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