



Thanksgiving is rapidly approaching, and many are wondering if and how they can safely celebrate with friends and family. During lockdown, things were simple. You stayed home with your household and everything else was virtual. Now that many of us are fully vaccinated the most severe restrictions have been relaxed. However, the aggressive and highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread within our community and too many people are still unvaccinated for us to relax our guard. Breakthrough infections in those fully vaccinated, although uncommon, are also creating anxiety and confusion about what is safe. Statistics are great for discussing infection risk or effectiveness of vaccination, but they are less helpful when you are trying to decide if you can safely see your unvaccinated, school age grandchildren. So, here are some ways to reduce the risks of inviting COVID to your Thanksgiving celebration.

**Keep the numbers down.** Remember, anyone can still have COVID. While legally, 25 people can gather indoors, the more people around, the greater the chances that someone is spreading COVID!

**Limit the number of groups or households who are gathering.** Each person within a group or household has multiple contacts, exponentially increasing the chances that any one of them has been exposed to COVID. The more COVID in the community, the higher this risk.

**Minimize the number of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people in the group.** This is very important with school children who are at high risk to catch and spread COVID. Mixing children from different and possibly distant schools increases the risks to everyone at the gathering and no one wants to be the cause of yet another school outbreak. People who are fully vaccinated but immunocompromised or anyone who has only had one shot may also have little protection from the delta variant.

**Limit the number who are eating – or not wearing masks.** Masks prevent COVID from spreading – but it's hard to eat while you are wearing one. Many of us look forward to seeing different family members during the holidays, but all that talking, laughing and arguing could fill the room with COVID particles long before dinner is over. Dining in the open air decreases this risk – but is of course weather dependent. Otherwise, consider visiting together before or after the meal and perhaps creating take-away meals for those not able to stay for dinner.

**Consider your pre-gathering exposure risks.** In addition to the usual COVID screening questions, consider what else you might have done in the past 2 weeks that might increase your risk of being exposed to COVID. This might include eating indoors at a restaurant, working out at the gym without a mask or being on a train, bus or other crowded area with people not wearing masks. While you may be comfortable with these risks, you could be putting other vulnerable people at risk.

**Get tested.** If you have any symptoms or if there is any chance you might have been exposed to COVID please get tested. You can usually get your results within 24 hours from most testing centres.

**Ask about vaccination status,** and consider seeing unvaccinated friends and family virtually.

Please remember that COVID can kill even the young and healthy. Keep it small, keep it safe and have a happy Thanksgiving.