Many Americans Plan to Gather for the Holidays During COVID-19

Experts urge people to celebrate virtually but say if individuals choose to meet, they should wear masks and socially distance.

November 23, 2020 By Alicia Green

The holiday season is going to look different this year as COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the United States. However, a new survey reveals that a large number of Americans still plan to attend large holiday gatherings that won't require social distancing or mask wearing, reports The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

For the study, researchers conducted a survey to assess the precautions American adults were likely to take during family holiday celebrations. Results showed that 73% of Americans polled plan to practice social distancing at family events; 79% will celebrate with only household members; 67% would request those who attend to wear masks; and 62% would attend a family gathering of no more than 10 close relatives. In addition, 82% said they'd asked those with COVID symptoms to stay away.

However, nearly two in five Americans reported that they will attend events with more than 10 people or nonfamily members. One third said guests won't be asked to wear masks.

"When you're gathered together around the table, engaged in conversation, sitting less than six feet apart with your masks down, even in a small group, that's when the spread of this virus can really happen," said Iahn Gonsenhauser, MD, MBA, chief quality and patient safety officer at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Gonsenhauser advised that the least risky solution is for families to find ways to celebrate virtually. He suggested virtual dinners or gift exchanges or dropping off surprise treats as some fun and safe ways to indulge in the holiday spirit.

He recommended that hosts should create a plan and advise guests of their strategy. Gonsenhauser stressed that masks should be worn at all times, seating should be arranged by household and one or two people be assigned to serve food. These same precautions should be followed outdoors as well.

Also, individuals who plan to travel or welcome out-of-town visitors should stay informed about

COVID-19 rates and restrictions in the pertinent areas. During the Friday and Saturday preceding the holiday, the Transportation Security Administration logged more than 2 million travelers at U.S. airports, CNN reports.

“If you have someone in your household who’s high risk and you’re in a low incidence area, you’re going to want to think twice about having a celebration where people are coming from an area where there’s a lot of virus in the community,” Gonsenhauser said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers additional information about Celebrating Thanksgiving.

For more information, see “7 Ways to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19.”

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