

Planning safer gatherings



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Everybody is eager to connect with friends and family, especially after experiencing the isolation of lockdown. The challenge is making sure everybody stays safe while COVID is still in our community, and while we have neither vaccine nor cure. Unfortunately, we risk spreading the virus even before we know we're infected, so to protect those we love, it's important to take precautions all the time (1,2,3).

Research is showing that the greatest transmission risk is because of respiratory droplets – the invisible droplets that come out of our nose and mouth when we breathe, talk, cough, or sneeze – and so this is the most important focus

of transmission prevention (1,2,3). The next likely transmission risk is through touching a surface after someone who is infected with COVID (1,2,3). When you meet others outside your household, **put in place multiple layers of prevention**, because we're never going to use them all perfectly – more precautions mean there's back-up when one preventative measure is compromised.

Be choosy about who you interact with

- Most importantly: **Any person experiencing symptoms should cancel their plans** and stay home, get tested, and follow all public health instructions that they receive (3,4,5,6). Even if symptoms are mild, take it seriously, rather than risk others' health.
- **Interact with fewer people than you would have pre-COVID.** Based on predictive modeling for British Columbia, Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Chief Medical Officer of British Columbia, has suggested we can comfortably keep community case numbers low if we interact with not more than 60% of the people that we would have pre-COVID (7) – 50% or less is even more advisable for community benefit. If case numbers are going up in your community, decrease your in-person interactions to lower your risk of infection (4).
- **Limit the total number of guests** (4,6,8). It's not just about ensuring space between people, but also about the total number of people who risk exposure if an infected person were at the gathering.
- **Limit the number of households represented** (8,9). Six people from three households is less risk than six people who are all from different households.
- **Keep a log of your interactions**, in case you will be involved in contact tracing. Record the date, who you interacted with, and approximately how long; note especially longer interactions (>15 min) at close-range.
- If you have to limit your interactions, it's worth being selective about who you want to spend time with. My thought is to spend time with those who practice good COVID prevention – they are less likely to be carriers of the virus than someone who has a relaxed attitude. If COVID prevention is important to you, then you'll likely also feel more at ease, because your values and priorities are respected.

Protect against transmission by respiratory droplets – use more than one strategy to decrease risk.

1. **Good ventilation** seems to be the best protection against respiratory droplets (4,5,9). The best ventilation is outdoors; if that's not possible, you'll do well to meet in a room that has windows open, or an HVAC system that effectively replaces the air. If you must meet in a poorly ventilated room, the larger the volume of space, the better, and implement as many of the precautions below as you can.
2. **Keep at least 2 meters apart** (4,5,6,8,9). It's still true. It's still an important preventative measure, even if you have good ventilation.



Meet outdoors, if you can, for best ventilation and protection.



**NAVIGATE
YOUR HEALTH**

202, 10526 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 1Z7

ph: 780-224-0467

e-mail: info@navigateyourhealth.ca

website: www.navigateyourhealth.ca

3. **Wear a face mask, especially if you're indoors**, and if you are able (4,5,6). The mask will block the large respiratory droplets from entering the shared air.
4. **Keep your visits short** (4). The longer two people spend together, the higher the chance that an infected person would transmit the virus.

Protect against transmission by high-touch surfaces

1. **Disinfect** door knobs, light switches, especially where guests enter your home, and in the washroom; also disinfect the washroom faucets and toilet handle (8). Disinfect before the guest(s) arrive(s), and after they leave.
2. **Have hand sanitizer** in the room where you and your guest/s are visiting (5) – invite them to use it when they arrive, and before they eat or drink anything.
3. **Have clean towels available** (5). If you have multiple guests, make paper towel available; if you have one guest, a fresh cloth towel is acceptable.



Disinfect high-touch surfaces, like bathroom door knobs, before and after your visit.

Be cautious about food

- It's safest is if everyone brings their own food and refreshments (5), or if no food is consumed at all during the visit.
- If you insist on serving your guest(s):
 - wash your hands well before handling food and dishes (10).
 - it's safer if guests bring their own plate, utensils, and cup (9).
 - only one person dishes and serves the food – that person has washed their hands before dishing and serving (5,9).

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Kirstin Veugelers, PhD (Biochemistry)

Personal Patient Navigator

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