



Preserving, protecting, and promoting public health in our community

DRAFT For Immediate Release **DRAFT**

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Subject: Safer Fall Celebrations

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As many people in the United States begin to plan for fall and winter holiday celebrations, the Webster County Health Unit encourages individuals or groups planning activities to consider the following guidelines recommended by the CDC, to help protect individuals, their families, friends, and communities from COVID-19. When planning to host a holiday celebration, you should assess current COVID-19 levels in your community to determine whether to postpone, cancel, or limit the number of attendees.

Celebrating virtually or with members of your own household pose low risk for spread. In-person gatherings pose varying levels of risk. Event organizers and attendees should consider the risk of virus spread based on event size and use of mitigation strategies. There are several factors that contribute to the risk of getting infected or infecting others with the virus that causes COVID-19 at a holiday celebration. In combination, these factors will create various amounts of risk, so it is important to consider them individually and together:

- **Community levels of COVID-19** – Higher levels of COVID-19 cases and community spread in the gathering location, as well as where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees. Family and friends should consider the number and rate of COVID-19 cases in their community and in the community where they plan to celebrate when considering whether to host or attend a holiday celebration. Information on the number of cases in an area can be found on the Health Unit’s website at <http://webstercohealth.com/covid-19/>.
- **The location of the gathering** – Indoor gatherings generally pose more risk than outdoor gatherings. Indoor gatherings with poor ventilation pose more risk than those with good ventilation, such as those with open windows or doors.
- **The duration of the gathering** – Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter gatherings.
- **The number of people at the gathering** – Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. CDC does not have a limit or recommend a specific number of attendees for gatherings. The size of a holiday gathering should be determined based on the ability to reduce or limit contact between attendees, the risk of spread between attendees, and state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations.

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- **The locations attendees are traveling from** – Gatherings with attendees who are traveling from different places pose a higher risk than gatherings with attendees who live in the same area. Higher levels of COVID-19 cases and community spread in the gathering location, or where attendees are coming from, increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees.
- **The behaviors of attendees prior to the gathering** – Gatherings with attendees who are not adhering to social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart), mask wearing, hand washing, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk than gatherings with attendees who are engaging in these preventative behaviors.
- **The behaviors of attendees during the gathering** – Gatherings with more preventive measures, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing, in place pose less risk than gatherings where fewer or no preventive measures are being implemented.

The CDC discourages participation in any in-person festivities, if you or anyone in your household

- Has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not met the criteria for when it is safe to be around others
- Has symptoms of COVID-19
- Is waiting for COVID-19 viral test results
- May have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Is at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19

Many traditional Fall activities can be high-risk for spreading viruses. There are several safer, alternative ways to participate in Halloween and other fall activities. If you may have COVID-19 or you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, the CDC recommends that you should not participate in in-person these festivities and should not give out candy to trick-or-treaters.

Lower Risk Activities Include:

- Carving or decorating pumpkins with members of your household and displaying them
- Carving or decorating pumpkins outside, at a safe distance, with neighbors or friends
- Decorating your house, apartment, or living space
- Doing a Halloween scavenger hunt where children are given lists of Halloween-themed things to look for while they walk outdoors from house to house admiring Halloween decorations at a distance
- Having a virtual Halloween costume contest
- Having a Halloween movie night with people you live with
- Having a scavenger hunt-style trick-or-treat search with your household members in or around your home rather than going house to house

Moderate Risk Activities Include:

- Participating in one-way trick-or-treating where individually wrapped goodie bags are lined up for families to grab and go while continuing to social distance (such as at the end of a driveway or at the edge of a yard)
 - If you are preparing goodie bags, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 second before and after preparing the bags.
- Having a small group, outdoor, open-air costume parade where people are distanced more than 6 feet apart
- Attending a costume party held outdoors where protective masks are used and people can remain more than 6 feet apart

- A costume mask (such as for Halloween) is not a substitute for a cloth mask. A costume mask should not be used unless it is made of two or more layers of breathable fabric that covers the mouth and nose and doesn't leave gaps around the face.
- Do not wear a costume mask over a protective cloth mask because it can be dangerous if the costume mask makes it hard to breathe. Instead, consider using a Halloween-themed cloth mask.
- Going to an open-air, one-way, walk-through haunted forest where appropriate mask use is enforced, and people can remain more than 6 feet apart
 - If screaming will likely occur, greater distancing is advised. The greater the distance, the lower the risk of spreading a respiratory virus.
- Visiting pumpkin patches or orchards where people use hand sanitizer before touching pumpkins or picking apples, wearing masks is encouraged or enforced, and people are able to maintain social distancing
- Having an outdoor Halloween movie night with local family friends with people spaced at least 6 feet apart
 - If screaming will likely occur, greater distancing is advised. The greater the distance, the lower the risk of spreading a respiratory virus.

The Webster County Health Unit recommends avoiding these higher risk activities to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19:

- Participating in traditional trick-or-treating where treats are handed to children who go door to door
- Having trunk-or-treat where treats are handed out from trunks of cars lined up in large parking lots
- Attending crowded costume parties held indoors
- Going to an indoor haunted house where people may be crowded together and screaming
- Going on hayrides or tractor rides with people who are not in your household
- Using alcohol or drugs, which can cloud judgement and increase risky behaviors
- Traveling to a rural fall festival that is not in your community if you live in an area with community spread of COVID-19

Celebrations will likely need to be different this fall to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Avoid activities that are higher risk for spread. Consider fun alternatives that pose lower risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. More information can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>.

About the Webster County Health Unit

Established in 1957 by a vote of the people of Webster County, the Webster County Health Unit continues its commitment to preserve, protect, and promote public health in the communities that it serves. More information on the services provided by the Unit can be found at www.webstercohealth.com.

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