

OzSAGE Media Release - Festive Season 2023

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How to have a safer festive season with COVID-19 cases rising in our communities

As COVID-19 cases increase across the country, many people are asking - "what can I do to help my family and friends - especially older ones - have a safer festive season while COVID-19 is around?"

Unfortunately, Christmas shopping, socialising and other festive activities also bring a significant risk of catching and spreading SARS-COV-2.

Every infection increases your risk of long-term complications like Long COVID, so avoiding infection is smart.

OzSAGE offers the following suggestions to reduce spread of COVID-19, based on our experts' [Vaccine-PLUS and Ventilation strategy](#).

The virus predominantly spreads in an airborne fashion. SARS-CoV-2 is inhaled in tiny, invisible aerosols that accumulate in the air, particularly indoors in poorly-ventilated spaces, **just like cigarette smoke.**

Aerosols are more concentrated the closer you are to someone's mouth and nose, which is why, even in outdoor environments, there is benefit in maintaining some distance, such as standing or sitting a bit further away from each other than we might have done before the pandemic.

The things we can all do to protect ourselves and reduce the risk of getting infected and passing COVID-19 to others include:

- Get vaccinated with as many vaccine doses as you are eligible for, as soon as possible.
- Get a vaccine booster soon as you are eligible.
- Wear a well-fitting mask when inside, or in a crowded location outside – masks are effective for reducing the risk of you getting COVID-19, or passing it on to others if you are infected. An N95 or P2 respirator will give you the best protection, but any mask is better than none.
- Minimise the risk of COVID-19 in the lead-up to large events around Christmas and New Year's Eve.

This will ensure you do not give your family an unwelcome present – COVID-19.

While COVID is surging in the community - avoid large gatherings, shop online and have gifts and groceries delivered whenever possible. Alternatively try “click and collect,” but spend the least amount of time possible collecting the items, always wearing a well-fitted face mask in public indoor spaces.

Avoid spending time in busy indoor environments like pubs, where lots of people are unmasked and some will be emitting virus-laden aerosols into the shared air.

Consider skipping unnecessary functions entirely, particularly if you are planning to spend time over the holidays with anyone at higher risk - such as older folks, people who have medical conditions, or a compromised immune system.

When hosting events conduct them outdoors if possible, and ask guests to stay home if they have symptoms. Open as many doors and windows in your home as you can, to have safe, clean indoor air. Flush out the virus.

Consider asking Santa for a portable HEPA filter and run it during events - see [this guide by OzSAGE member A/Prof Robyn Schofield](#) - and read OzSAGE's [ventilation advice](#).

- If you have the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms, or are a close contact, get tested. Use a rapid antigen test (RAT) which are still available from the supermarket or pharmacy. The afternoon or morning prior to social events (for example, Christmas Day), use a RAT and ask your guests to also test. If you can afford a pack of tests, you can test people at the door and get the results in 15 minutes.
- If you are an essential worker, make plans for childcare for if you get called to work (short staffing is more likely to happen as the number of cases increase).
- Have a plan ready in case someone in your household gets COVID-19. Consider how to arrange things for others dependent on you: adults, children and animals, in case you suddenly need to isolate or are unwell.
- Are you visiting someone who is elderly or immunosuppressed - such as your parents or grandparents, a friend with a kidney transplant, or a neighbour having cancer treatment? It is important that you know that even if this person is vaccinated, they are still at risk of catching COVID-19 and can get very sick.

Things you can do that might help:

- o In the week before visiting them, don't go to events or locations where there is a higher chance of someone having COVID-19.
- o Take a rapid antigen test before visiting them.
- o Even better, take a rapid antigen test each day in the three days before visiting them.

None of these recommendations are perfect, but the more of them you implement, the lower the chance of catching or passing on the virus - it is all about reducing the odds.

If we all try these simple measures, we may be able to reduce risk and reduce the harm of COVID-19 for ourselves, our families, friends and communities.

We can also reduce the risk of super-spreading events and help start 2024 with less COVID-19 than we might otherwise have.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Holidays - however, wherever and whoever you celebrate with - from OzSAGE.

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