

## **How to have a safe(r) festive season with COVID-19 cases rising in our communities.**

**Advice prepared by OzSAGE December 20 2021**



## How to have a safe(r) 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 have a safe(r) Christmas? Unfortunately, between the Delta and Omicron variants of SARS-CoV-2, both of which are circulating widely in Australia, socialising also comes with significant risk of catching and spreading coronavirus.

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

The virus predominantly [spreads in an airborne fashion](#) – SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted via tiny aerosols that accumulate in the air, particularly indoors in poorly-ventilated spaces, just like cigarette smoke does. 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** and get as many vaccine doses as you are eligible for, as soon as possible. For most children aged 12 to 17 years, this means being double-vaccinated. **For all adults, this means being triple-vaccinated.**
- **Get your booster / third dose** as soon as you are eligible. Third dose boosters are now available from five months since your second dose. Pfizer and Moderna are similar vaccines and you should get whichever you can access earliest.
- **Minimise contact** with unvaccinated persons and [do not be afraid to ask](#) if people are vaccinated. While it may cause some social friction, spending less time with unvaccinated family members and friends will be safer for you and them, and for infants and children who are not yet eligible for vaccination. Approaching these conversations with kindness may also help encourage your unvaccinated loved ones to reconsider their decision.
- **Always wear a well-fitting mask** when inside or in a crowded location outside – masks are effective in reducing the risk of you getting COVID-19 or passing it on to others if you are infected.
- **Minimise the risk of COVID-19** in the lead-up to large events on Christmas and New Year's. For example, avoid large gatherings, shop online and have gifts and groceries delivered. If you don't have time or don't want to pay for postage, "click and collect" and 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 likely to be emitting virus-laden aerosols into the shared air. Consider skipping some functions entirely, particularly if you are planning to spend time over the holidays with anyone at higher risk (older folks, people who have medical conditions or a compromised immune system, etc.).
- **When hosting events** such as Christmas lunch, conduct them outdoors as much as possible. Keep people a little bit further apart that you would have pre-pandemic, to reduce the potential for short-range aerosol transmission. Open as many doors and

windows in your house or apartment as you can, to have safe, clean indoor air. Flush out the virus. Consider asking Santa for a portable HEPA filter and run it continually indoors (see [this guide](#) by OzSAGE member A/Prof Robyn Schofield) and read our [ventilation advice](#)).

- **If you have the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms or are a close contact**, visit a testing site because a PCR test will give the most accurate result. If you don't have any symptoms, use a [rapid antigen test](#) (RAT) which can be bought from the supermarket or pharmacy. The afternoon or morning prior to social events (for example, Christmas Day), use a RAT and ask your party guests to get tested. If you can afford a pack of tests, you can test people at the door and get the results in 15 minutes while they wait outdoors in the fresh air.
- **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 for if 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 become a contact and need to isolate or are unwell.
- **Are you visiting someone who is elderly or immunosuppressed?** It is important that you know that even if this person is vaccinated (*such as your grandparents, a friend with a kidney transplant, a neighbour having cancer treatment*) they are still at risk of catching COVID-19 and can get very sick. Things you can do that might help:
  - In the week before visiting them, don't go to events or locations where there is a higher chance of someone having COVID-19.
  - Take a rapid antigen test before visiting them.
  - 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. If we all do our best, we may be able to reduce risk and reduce the harm of COVID-19 on ourselves, our families, our friends and our communities. We can also reduce the risk of super-spreading events (like the Argyle nightclub in Newcastle) and help start 2022 with much less COVID-19 than we might otherwise have.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Holidays from OzSAGE.