

Ask an epidemiologist: How to safely celebrate the holidays

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This could be the year for virtual holiday celebrations due to COVID-19. Photo by Shutterstock.

What do you do when the most wonderful time of the year happens during a growing pandemic?

It's a question Tulane epidemiologist [Susan Hassig](#) is worried about as people across the country plan their Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas and other holiday celebrations. After a year when so many friends and family have spent months apart, will people be more likely to let down their guard and ignore COVID-19 safety precautions because they can't bear to forgo cherished holiday traditions?

"I am concerned," said Hassig, director of the MPH program in epidemiology at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. "The emotions around connection at the holidays and the traditions that we value are a real challenge for us to deal with."

Hassig spent time with Tulane's [On Good Authority](#) podcast answering COVID-19 safety questions about how to plan for Thanksgiving, what to consider for travel and holiday gatherings and whether this should be the year for Zoom celebrations.

She normally celebrates Thanksgiving with her daughter and extended family, but this year they'll be having dinner "physically separate but united in some other way — probably over FaceTime or Zoom."

The challenge epidemiologists are seeing is that many people have very different perceptions of COVID-19 risk and what kinds of risks they're willing to take. The data shows that [small, private gatherings](#) are increasingly driving the spread of the virus.

"Just because someone is a member of your family doesn't mean that it's necessarily safe to be in close proximity to them indoors without a mask. And it's an unfortunate reality in this time, but it's one I think we need to consider when we're thinking about how to celebrate," she said.

To hear more of Hassig's advice on precautions to take if you're gathering and when to get a COVID-19 test, listen to the episode at <https://tulane.edu/on-good-authority/episode-7-talkin-turkey-with-epidemiologist>.