

Staying safe & still finding joy and meaning in the holidays during COVID-19

Presenter – Aimee Prange

Welcome to, staying safe and still finding joy and meaning in the holidays during COVID-19. My name is Aimee Prange, and I'll be your presenter for today. As the pandemic continues, we have to learn and adjust, and find newfound flexibility in how we approach our day to day. But what about the holiday season? Sadly, the virus just doesn't take a hiatus just because it's a holiday.

Today we'll discuss

Today we'll talk about considerations for safely enjoying and sharing the holiday season, while making new adjustments and continuing to remain flexible in our ever-changing environment.

Managing expectations

I don't know about you, but sometimes I literally have to stop what I'm doing, and take a quick inventory of my expectations. This year is like no other, I can probably say any of us have ever experienced. What may have been typical expectations last year have been null and void this year.

As the holiday are rapidly approaching, it might be helpful to ask yourself a few questions, especially if you're hoping for family or group gatherings. Is travel necessary to achieve those expectations? I mean, you know, your situation best. Are you or anyone that you would typically spend time with at the holidays in a high-risk category for the coronavirus? If your holiday plans typically include extended visits, think about where will you stay? How many people will be there? Does this put anyone at potential risk? Thinking about, you know, where you go on a day-to-day basis, and what kind of daily exposure you have, but what about the people you may potentially stay with, or who may come to stay with you? Those are things to take into consideration.

Again, asking yourself whether or not travel is reasonable and realistic, depending on potential exposure risks. Thinking about, you know, what are the options? How will you celebrate the holidays? Will it be at home, outdoors, virtual, some combination? What makes the most sense for you and your family? And, you know, if the traditional isn't really

very realistic, what are the alternatives? It's about thinking, what do the holidays really mean to me? And can I still hold true to my traditions, and, you know, get the full impact of the holidays, even if I have to do something different?

Remember the holidays are not just about you, but it's also about, what's the comfort level of others? And, you know, there's only so much that's within our own span of control. We can control our, where we go individually, and perhaps our immediate household members, what kind of exposure they have. But do we have control on where others are going, how much exposure they've had? What is, you know, so keeping in perspective, not only expectations, but also just things that are realistic and unrealistic.

Destination precautions

If you plan to travel, that's a personal decision. And so you have to think about, you know, depending on where you're going, are you staying within your home state, just maybe traveling to another city? Are you leaving the state? What is the state's reported virus caseload, you know, in the seven days leading up to when you plan to travel? So it may be a game-day decision for you. Does your destination point have any requirements, or restrictions for travelers?

So do they require if you're coming from out of state that you have quarantined for, you know, 14 or more days, prior to entering the state? Do they have any states on a list of sort of banned states, of, you know, where people are coming from? Do they have any mandatory testing requirements? You know, and again, thinking about who will be in attendance for this holiday gathering, and where is everybody coming from?

I can think even, you know, from my own family situation, while my sister and my parents, and I, we all live in the same state, but we live in three different cities, and two of our cities have very high risk case rates right now, and so what does that mean for other family members, if we all get together? Thinking about, you know, my kids and my sister's kids are in school some of the times, so we can't control who they're exposed to. And what does that mean in terms of then coming to visit my parents?

So these are all very serious, but not easy questions that we have to contemplate. The other piece is if you will travel, what form of transportation will you be taking? How are you going to get there? Do you get to take your own car? Will you be taking some other form of transportation? Plane, train, boat, you know, whatever that might, bus? What does that look like? And then again, what's your travel risk.

What's your risk?

The CDC has put out some things to think about in terms of, you know, evaluating your level of risk, and then making decisions from there. In order to have the lowest amount of risk for yourself, staying home is the best way to protect yourself, and others, from COVID-19, hands down. That's the reality. Short trips by car with members of your household with no stops along the way, if you do plan to travel. That will give you the lowest risk.

But risk increases, as you know, you put yourself out there. So if you're taking a longer trip that may include stops along the way. That's going to increase risk. Even greater risks trips, you know, with people who are outside of your household. So where you may be traveling in a car or RV, or some other transportation, although they may be people that you know well, if they don't live in your household, that will increase your risk.

Again, long distance trips by train, or plane, or bus, direct flights, that's going to increase risks. And then at the highest risk level, if you are flying somewhere, and you have to make multiple connections with layovers. Now you are increasing your risk level with each stop at a new airport. Traveling on cruise ships, other boats, also will increase risk because of the number of people in close proximity that we, again don't have any control or knowledge of where they've been, or what their exposure has been.

Planes, trains, & automobiles

If you do plan to travel by some form of transportation, other than your own, some things to think about. Wearing a mask to cover your nose and mouth will help not only it, most importantly, protect others, but offer some level of protection for you. It's mostly to protect others. Ensuring that you are maintaining at least six feet distance apart from anyone not in your immediate household.

Frequent hand washing, I hope goes without saying. But making sure that you use soap, hand sanitizer, and again, doing that with a frequency to eliminate potential spread. Whenever possible, avoid touching public surfaces that are likely to have been touched by many other people. Think about, you know, how crowded is a flight going to be, of you need to fly. Will they be filling every seat? Will they fill every other seat, every other row? Depending on the airline and the demand for that flight that may change things. Are you able to get a direct flight versus making those multiple connections?

Try to avoid, if you're driving, trying to avoid making multiple stops for gas, food, bathroom breaks on the road. You know, if you can, pack your own food, bring snacks with you so that you don't have to stop in public places to get that. Obviously nature will call, but what can you do to reduce the number of breaks, and stops whenever possible? Avoid crowded

places, and whenever possible, consider opening windows for more ventilation, especially if you're on like a bus, or traveling in a vehicle where with other passengers that are not from your immediate household.

In-person gatherings

And what about the actual gatherings? You know, to gather or not gather in person? Some things to think about, you know, in terms of how do you have an enjoyable gathering, but actually be able to get together in person.

One of the things is to think about, you know, A, kind of limiting the guest list, not too big, but ask yourself, are your guests agreeable to self quarantine at home for 14 days beforehand? You know, to ensure that there is a level of safety. Can your guests drive to your home without having to stop? Again, those meal and bathroom breaks. Will guess, you know, agree to skip the, you know, the hugs, the kisses, the handshakes that we're also accustomed to, and that we really love and endear, but maybe have to forgo this time around? Can members of different households kind of stay, you know, to their own corners, if you will?

Stay six feet apart. Keep families of the same household seated near each other, so that others can spread out. What about staggering seating around the table? Again, just, well, immediate family members, or household members can sit next to one another. Can you have distance among people, not in your household? T

Thinking about, you know, the opportunity to use disposable utensils and plates, to reduce any potential, you know, contamination or touching things that don't have to be touched, where plates can go directly into the trash. Maybe even have only one person offer to serve for all with gloves on and, you know, not using any kind of shared utensils. Instead of that family-style meal of passing the plates around the table, maybe for once you could have somebody come, you know, serve each plate individually, with that same person. And while not, you know, the most ideal, but definitely the safest can, you know, individuals agree to wear a mask indoors, when not eating, or drinking, you know, to keep everyone else safe.

Don't cancel the holidays just yet

Now don't cancel the holidays just yet. If in-person gatherings are not at your comfort level, are not realistic. Just something that, you know, you have decided is something that you may want to hold off on this year, that doesn't mean that you can't have holiday joy. There's still other alternatives, things you can think about. You know, for many, the absence of outdoor states and restrictions on indoor gatherings means, you know, maybe you have to

think about, can you head to a local beach or a park? Is there opportunity where there is public yet, you know, a larger space available that you can use?

Think about, you know, if you are going to use some of these other spaces, can you still follow social distancing guidelines? You know, keeping groups limited to three, or fewer households, so that you can kind of keep those little pods or quarantine bubbles, you know, merging with other holiday gatherings. So if you see other people who are also in that same space, try not to merge with them, keep your gathering separate. And then, you know, when you think about it, can you have one person in charge of, you know, kind of the planning, the agenda, leading the, leading it, the whole even, so that it can go a little bit more smoothly. Especially if you're thinking about like a live video gathering. You know, you can do lots of creative things. So it's not just a bunch of people staring at each other, or everyone's eating on video, which might come across as weird or awkward, you know, get creative.

I can, you know, for my dad's birthday this past year, my mom did a cooking demonstration. Since we couldn't have birthday cake with my dad in person, we all, my mom did a demonstration of baking his favorite birthday cake. And we all did it in our own separate households. So everyone got their own cake, and the kids got involved, and it was really fun. So, you know, think about, can you do a cooking competition, maybe everyone gets to do a, make their own sides and do a demo of that, or have a theme.

Go with that structured agenda, you know, set limits. Maybe even do some kind of show and tell. There's lots of creative ways to make it still like entertaining and fun, but give it a little structure so that it doesn't feel awkward. Another idea is, you know, ask folks to bring an item to Thanksgiving for that video chat that represents what they're thankful for this year. So, you know, find things that can be meaningful for you, but can you add a little bit of extra fun to it.

Joy & meaning during the holidays

As we think about, you know, how do we ensure that there truly is joy and meaning during the holidays, even if we are apart.

Finding joy and meaning...

Remember, it's okay to take a timeout, and to do what is best for you and you alone. And by you, I mean, perhaps you, and your immediate household members. You know, think about if we can't be together with our loved ones this year, how can we still focus on family time in a new way, making new memories or new traditions, and make the focus less about the

material things, and more about the memories that you are creating. And again, potentially the new traditions. Say no when you want to.

Also think about how do you explore and reconnect with old family traditions that maybe you've lost sight with. Set new goals that you want to achieve in the coming year. Also, you know, something that people... People are often looking for meaning, and to get the most out of the holidays. And one of the best ways to do that is, are there volunteer opportunities or ways to give back? Be it, you know, just simply reaching out to a neighbor who may be alone. Spreading little acts of kindness, leaving a note on somebody's doorstep, a little, you know, plate of goodies, something that, you know, just brings a little extra cheer, lets people know that they're thought about. But again, you know, maybe it's can you do something from a distance, or donate food that can go to a food bank in terms of serving others for the holidays? Can you do a clothing drive? What does that look like in terms of making sure that you can give back, and give yourself the true meaning of the holidays?

Reconnect with friends, and family, and others. And most importantly, if you need help or, you know, you're feeling isolated, ask for help. It's okay to ask for help. No one says you have to do this alone. And so think about that. And what does help look like? Be it professional help, calling a friend, calling a loved one, looking for some self-help. Help is available.

Looking ahead

As we look ahead to the new year to come, you know, and reflect on how this year was different. You don't have to do it all for this holiday to still be meaningful, and for it to still feel special, and magical. Again, no one asked for help and support, or maybe just some encouraging words. Make this holiday season about what makes you happy, and you know, without compromising other, you know, your happiness for others. Let non-tradition be the new tradition. Next year is a new beginning, and there is always tomorrow. If today doesn't bring you the outcome you had hoped, tomorrow is a new day, and you get to start over. You get to write your new beginning.

Conclusion

So I wish you all a very happy holiday, whatever you celebrate. Let this year be an opportunity to be thankful for the things that we have, and to set new goals, look for new opportunities, and, you know, appreciate those that are in our lives. Take care, everyone. And again, have a wonderful holiday season.

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