

Time for T.H.A.N.K.S. – Wellstar Physician Guidance for Thanksgiving 2020

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As many Georgians plan for Thanksgiving, it's important to protect families, friends, and communities from the spread of COVID-19. Travel and traditional gatherings in a home, around a table, and sharing a meal can promote spread of the coronavirus. In fact, some studies show that small gatherings are one of the greatest contributors to community spread, in part as a result of people relaxing safety behaviors among friends and family. Things will be a bit different this year than in the past, so to help you navigate the holidays safely, Wellstar has prepared some "T.H.A.N.K.S." tips:

T TECHNOLOGY CONNECTS SAFELY

With the many technology solutions available, you can now safely celebrate with more of your friends and family than ever before.

1. Virtual meetings offer the safest way to celebrate the holidays during the pandemic. Use the opportunity and technology to your advantage.
2. Set a goal for gathering as many friends and family as possible on a virtual pre-meal meeting and reunion.
3. Go around the virtual room and ask everyone to share what they are thankful for. Record it and share with everyone as a time capsule.
1. Play virtual Thanksgiving Bingo and have some fun with it.
2. Share recipes in the chat bar and ask someone in your group to compile a 2020 Thanksgiving recipe book to commemorate the unique event.
3. Use technology for shopping the sales instead of going in-person or pre-order and do curbside pick-up. Some of the best sales are online, so you can stay safe and save money!

H HAVE A PLAN

No matter how you plan to celebrate Thanksgiving and other holidays, advance planning will be important. While these tips may seem awkward, each and every gesture is a way to show you care about those you are gathering with.

1. If you plan to do a virtual Thanksgiving meeting (which is advised), make sure everyone knows how to use the technology so there are no frustrations on the special day.
2. Plan for how you will share updates and traditions, and play virtual games, so everyone is on the same page.

3. If you do have family members gathering, firmly establish ground rules in advance about the importance of wearing masks when not eating, how close people can get, frequent handwashing, sanitizing and disinfecting of surfaces, who uses which bathrooms, and how you will exchange affections. Hugging and kissing people who are not part of your immediate household could spread the virus, so is not advised during the pandemic. Find another way to show you care, such as air hugs or distantly blown kisses.

4. Consider asking everyone who is gathering to get a flu shot two weeks prior, as well.

1. In addition, there are almost 22M college and university students in the U.S., and about 50% live in on-campus or off-campus housing. Many of the campuses are sending students home for Thanksgiving, and they will need to quarantine when they arrive to keep everyone safe. College campuses have seen some of the highest numbers of cases in recent months, and although most teenagers and young adults are not seriously affected by COVID-19, they can very easily bring it home to Mom, Dad, Grandma or Grandpa, or a sibling who could get fatally ill. Plan for quarantine, sanitization and disinfecting, and the 3 Ws of Wear a mask *and* Wash your hands *and* Watch your distance while they are home.

A AVOID UNNECESSARY TRAVEL

During a pandemic, it is not advised to travel, no matter how much you want to go see family and friends. You could unknowingly carry the virus from one place to another and get someone you know very ill. If is necessary to travel during the holiday, take precautions to minimize transmission of COVID-19.

1. Quarantine for 10 days prior to travel and consider getting a PCR test three days prior to departure.
1. Practice the 3 Ws at all times.
2. Sanitize and disinfect often.
3. Try to drive your own car if possible and take snacks and drinks with you.
4. If you can, consider getting a hotel room or rental property so you are not in someone else's home. Wipe down everything, often, with disinfecting wipes.
5. If anyone – including your college student – has symptoms, they should *not* travel, and should stay put until they are better.

N NEXT YEAR MAY BE EVEN BETTER

Thanksgiving, like any holiday, can truly be celebrated any time of the year. We do this often for birthdays, so why not Thanksgiving, too?

1. Consider having a gathering when there is an effective vaccine or treatment.
2. Save up for an even bigger and better Thanksgiving celebration next year.

1. Plan for a half-Thanksgiving in May, when the weather is nicer and gathering outside may be easier (and warmer).

K KEEP IT OUTSIDE AND DISTANCED

If you plan to gather in person, opt for social distancing outside, weather permitting. This will help with air flow.

1. Ask everyone to bring their own meal or provide pre-packaged meals for everyone. Buffets with shared food and serving utensils presents a high risk of viral transmission and should be avoided.
1. Consider using disposable plates and utensils that people can throw away themselves.
2. Even better, have a BYOE (Bring Your Own Everything) meal to minimize sharing and viral spread.
3. Have tables and chairs spaced out by at least six feet outdoors to limit transmission.
4. Ask people to wear masks when not eating.
5. If you have access multiple restrooms, allocate one for each family group so that you can limit sharing.
1. Provide sanitizer and soap for frequent hand washing.

S SERVE OTHERS

Instead of spending money on traveling to see family or making a big meal, think about donating to a charity that will provide care for others, such as a food distribution organization in your area. There are many people who have been adversely impacted by food insecurity during the pandemic, so helping local organizations that provide food access to vulnerable people would be a great way to honor the spirit of the holidays.

Wellstar suggests that people follow these tips and the [CDC guidelines](#) to keep your friends and family – as well as yourself – safe. You may not be aware that you, or someone in your friend and family circle, is carrying COVID-19, so we must always act as if we are. This year is not only an opportunity for everyone to take part in keeping loved ones safe, it is also a great time to be creative about new traditions. Give T.H.A.N.K.S., not COVID-19.

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