

Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department



Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

December 16, 2020

Health Department Issues Grave Warning Ahead of Winter Holidays as COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalizations & Deaths Have an Unrelenting Climb

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – As Hamilton County continues to see an unrelenting increase in the daily number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths among residents, the Hamilton County Health Department issues a grave warning to the community that holiday gatherings with members outside the household unit will intensify the virus in our community, and lead to further hospitalizations and death.

If people disregard recommendations for a safe winter holiday, the Health Department anticipates daily COVID-19 case counts, hospitalizations and deaths will be even higher than the current post-Thanksgiving spike seen currently. Many families in our community will continue to go through the pain of losing a loved one to COVID.

“We can turn the tables on this virus,” says Health Department Administrator Becky Barnes. “We plead with the community to take the necessary precautions this holiday season to slow the spread of the virus in our community.”

The Hamilton County Health Department wants residents to know how they can protect themselves and others from COVID-19 this holiday season. Individuals and families should fully adopt the following precautions in their observances of Christmas or other winter holidays.

High risk activities

Traveling to see family and friends should be avoided this year. COVID-19 is very active in our community and you should expect at least one person in any gathering to be in their infectious period of COVID-19, even if they are not showing symptoms. One person can spread the virus to multiple individuals in as little as 15 minutes.

If you are considering travel, ask yourself these important questions beforehand:

- Are you, or is someone in your household, or someone you will be visiting at [increased risk](#) for getting very sick from COVID-19?
- Are hospitals in your community, or at your destination, overwhelmed with patients who have COVID-19?

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- Hamilton County is currently seeing the highest number of people hospitalized compared to any other time during this pandemic.
- Do your plans include travel by airplane or taxi, which might make staying 6 feet apart impossible?

Low risk activities

The best way to protect yourself and others this year is to postpone travel, stay home and celebrate only with those in your household. Consider the following activities:

- Host a virtual celebration with family and friends
- Gather virtually for a gift exchange or activity
- Decorate for the season
- Throw a virtual dance party
- Attend a religious ceremony virtually if possible
- If your holiday traditions usually involve visiting Santa Claus, check for no-contact or virtual options.

“The Health Department can issue guidelines and recommendations, but we can’t control individual people and what they do in their homes over the holidays,” said Barnes. “We plead with the community to follow the recommendations so older family members and those with compromised health don’t catch the virus from you or someone else this holiday season. Do your part so your family members live to see next year’s holiday.”

Should you get tested before the holidays?

Pre-travel testing is not a reliable indicator of ongoing negativity. The COVID-19 nasal swab test indicates a positive or negative test result for that point-in-time only. Someone could be exposed unknowingly and take the virus to their destination. Someone could be exposed before the test but the amount of virus in his or her system was not yet detectable at the time of the test. Symptoms could begin to show a number of days after the onset of the infectious period.

If you are attempting to get tested several days before travel, extremely strict quarantine immediately following the test until the time you travel would be necessary. Despite careful testing and quarantine, however, the people you visit may infect you or your loved ones.

For more information about Christmas safety and the prevention of COVID-19 transmission, visit the [CDC’s Winter Holidays webpage](#).

Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

- Monitor your health daily. If you have any symptoms, regardless of how mild they may seem, do not leave home or attend any gatherings. Leave the house only to seek medical care or to get tested for COVID-19.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around people who don't live in your household.
- Put 6 feet of distance between yourself and people who don't live in your household.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

Get a Flu shot

- Free flu shots will be offered to adults 18 and older this Saturday, December 19, at Orchard Knob Baptist Church (1734 E. 3rd Street) from 10AM to 2PM.
- Call the Health Department's hotline at 423-209-8383 or visit their [online calendar](#) for pediatric flu shot information.
- Ask your health care provider or local pharmacist about the flu shot.
- Reducing your chances of getting the flu will help make this a safer holiday season.

COVID-19 Testing

Free Health Department COVID-19 testing at the Alstom site located at 999 Riverfront Parkway, Chattanooga, TN is open daily from 10AM to 2:30PM, but will be closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Daily testing will resume the following Saturday, December 26th.

For any questions or information about COVID-19 this holiday season, call the Health Department's hotline at (423) 209-8383 or connect with the Health Department on [social media](#).

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