



# Population Health Advisory Committee

## How to have a Safer 4<sup>th</sup> of July in a pandemic

The Fourth of July weekend is upon us and it's hard to imagine a weekend without fireworks and backyard barbeques. However, we are still in a pandemic and COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to break records for a third straight week in Bexar County. Local experts are warning that our hospital system could soon be overwhelmed. Our actions in the coming weeks will determine if our healthcare workers can do their jobs, if our friends and family will be safe and healthy and if our economy can remain open. The Population Health Advisory Committee (PHAC) recognizes that asking the community to abstain from all in-person social contact is difficult because of stay-at-home fatigue but from an infection-control standpoint ***we still recommend avoiding other households until our infection numbers are lower.*** As guidelines continue to shift, our efforts to keep ourselves, our families and the community safe should not. If you are going to host people outside of your household, below are some strategies to reduce potential harms to make socialization this weekend safer.

### As always, please follow the daily recommendations:

- Stay home if you feel sick
- Stay home if you know or think you have been exposed or if you are pending a test result
- Keep at least six feet from people who aren't in your household
- Wear a mask when you are outside of your home
- Wash your hands

### Plan the Guest List

- Keep it within the household. The safest plan is to celebrate the weekend with your household unit only.
- Limit the number of different households joining you. Each household is a different quarantine unit. The more households you put together, the higher the risk for infection.
- If you do invite guests, consider if they follow the basic three guidelines (mask, hand washing and distance) and do you trust them to not come over if they're sick, exposed, pending a test or still recovering?
- Inform everyone that the party is outdoors only (except for bathroom visits, see below) and that it will be canceled in the event of bad weather.

### Prepare the Party Space

- Keep it outside where there is better ventilation and more space. You substantially increase the risk of infection when gathering in indoor spaces for prolonged time.
- Create separate dining spaces. Set out tables for food: one for your household, one for your guest household. Use disposable utensils, plates, cutlery where possible.
- Plan for seating. Have guests bring their own chairs that can be placed more than 6 feet apart.
- Ensure that garbage bins are available outside because you don't want the host touching used cups, plates and utensils that have been in the mouths of others.

### Plan the Menu

- With the exception of food that will be grilled, guests should bring their own food, drink, ice and coolers and put them at their own tables.
- Shared food is a recipe for infection, as the virus may be transferred from dishes and serving spoons. Avoid finger foods. Every hand that goes into that bowl is an opportunity for viral transfer. Each family can have their own bowl of chips or dip.
- Serve directly off the grill onto a person's plate. This virus is killed by heat.



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- Place disposable plates, cutlery, napkins, cups and straws on each table, so each household has what it needs. You're trying to minimize the need for guests to get up and go look for items they're likely to need or want.
- No single-source containers, like kegs or pitchers, unless you have one person assigned to serve all drinks.
- The easiest and safest drink options are open coolers or tubs, one with bottled waters, another with sodas and another with beer or canned alcoholic beverages, so people don't have to open a lid and root around.

## Socialize Safely

- Maintaining appropriate physical distancing between households is still important. Avoid longer conversations in close proximity (less than 6 feet apart).
- Wear masks for conversation. We know that shouting and singing can spread more droplets than talking.
- Create barriers to restrict movement between households so that you don't drift closer to one another as the gathering goes on. This can be as simple as spacing chairs with a table between them.

## Children

- Games that bring children in close contact for a long time should be avoided. Keep them outside playing games with masks (if possible and age-appropriate).
- Set up some socially distant outdoor games, like badminton, charades, Simon Says or hula hoop and jump rope contests. Water fights are good socially distant activities because kids naturally run away from each other.
- Try to avoid games that bring you into close contact or result in lots of yelling.
- Tossing games, such as Frisbee or football, can be played, but remember objects that are touched more frequently with your hands may provide a vehicle for the virus to find its way into a new household.
- DIY outdoor movies can be projected on a screen or sheet hung on the side of the fence while everyone sits socially distanced on the lawn, sidewalk or driveway.
- The virus is not likely to live in chlorinated water. However, it can still be transmitted between people near each other in a pool. You still need to do physical distancing between households in the pool.

## Bathroom break

- Don't use cloth towels and bar soap in your bathroom. Use liquid soap and paper towels to limit the spread of germs.
- Provide enough garbage cans to hold discarded towels inside the bathroom *and* out, in case people want to use their towels when opening and closing the bathroom door. Do the same at the door that people will use to go in and out of your home.
- Tell everyone in advance that the rest of the house is off limits.

## Clean Up

- Everyone should toss their own garbage. Be mindful of used eating and drinking utensils. Dispose of them and wash hands.
- Leave the chairs and tables. Don't feel as if you have to scrub down your own outdoor furniture that is used by your guests while they are in your yard. Time and weather will take care of the virus.