

# Ask the Pediatrician: Can families with unvaccinated children gather safely for the holidays this year?

December 13 2021, by Dr. Jennifer Shu, American Academy Of Pediatrics

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Q: My children are too young to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Is it safe to

get together with our extended family for Christmas?

A: For many families, the holidays are about getting together with relatives and friends, but [children](#) younger than 5 years old are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. And, even though children ages 5 and up can get vaccinated, it takes two weeks after the second dose to be fully protected.

Everyone can play a role in protecting those at higher risk of severe illness as we gather this holiday season. If you'll be celebrating with [unvaccinated children](#) and other higher-risk loved ones, keep these tips in mind to help minimize exposure to COVID-19.

Think about celebrating only with fully vaccinated family and friends. Limiting gatherings to fully vaccinated guests is the best way to protect [young children](#) who are not yet vaccinated, as well as those who have weakened immune systems. Encourage loved ones who are eligible to get fully vaccinated before gatherings. Encourage everyone 18 and older to get booster shots. For loved ones who are not vaccinated, consider joining by [video chat](#) for traditions such as cooking a favorite dish, opening gifts or sharing words of gratitude before the meal.

Urge guests to stay home if they have symptoms of COVID-19. People should get tested if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have a close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Do not host or participate in any in-person festivities if you or anyone in your household has been:

- diagnosed with COVID-19 and is still at risk of spreading it to others
- has had any symptoms of COVID-19 within 48 hours of the gathering
- is waiting for viral test results, or has a known exposure to someone with COVID-19 within the last 14 days

The safest way to prevent the spread of the highly contagious delta variant is for families with vaccinated and unvaccinated members to wear masks at all indoor gatherings with others.

Additional ways to reduce risk:

- Keep the gathering small and short. Keep your guest list as small as possible and reduce the amount of time you would usually visit.
- Open windows and celebrate outside when possible. Open windows provide better ventilation. If weather permits, gather outdoors.
- Consider an outdoor treat exchange. Another way to share the holiday spirit is to prepare traditional recipes for family members and neighbors. Enjoy the treats outdoors with some hot cocoa or cider.
- Wash up often. Remind children to wash hands often, and keep hand sanitizer within reach.

Wear masks while holiday shopping indoors, especially in areas with substantial or high COVID-19 transmission rates. Avoid bringing children under 2 years old with you during [holiday](#) shopping trips, because they are too young to wear masks, or go when stores are not as busy.

If you're thinking of driving or flying somewhere for the holidays, consider that [public health experts](#) are still discouraging people who are not fully vaccinated from traveling. Families who must travel and have children who are not fully vaccinated should choose the safest travel options for their group.

If your child is too young for the vaccine, you may want to travel by car with members of your household who are vaccinated in a private vehicle,

if possible. Wear a mask at gas stations and rest stops. If you must travel by air, be careful around large groups clustered at security lines and concourses, wear masks in airports and on planes, and hang back until lines have thinned. Choose direct flights, if possible, to reduce your time in crowded airports.

Stay safe this [holiday season](#) and your [family](#) will be even more grateful for your traditions in the years to come.

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Citation: Ask the Pediatrician: Can families with unvaccinated children gather safely for the holidays this year? (2021, December 13) retrieved 21 November 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-12-pediatrician-families-unvaccinated-children-safely.html>

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