



Throughout National Lutheran Communities & Services (NLCS), we support over 900 residents and clients each day with close to 800 team members. Within this group, there are a variety of elements that determine our direction on policies, protocol and guidelines in specific relation to COVID-19 safety – caution, data, efficiencies in operations, care needs and government regulations. However, the number one priority will always remain the safety and well-being of residents, clients and team members.

NLCS acknowledges everyone's desire to uphold favorite holiday traditions. As we continue through the challenging times of COVID-19 and specifically through a time where the number of positive cases are increasing in our local areas, we also acknowledge the increased risk of exposure that accompanies some of those holiday traditions. We strongly encourage everyone within the National Lutheran family – residents, clients and team members – to consider the recommendations below when participating in gatherings or events throughout this holiday season.

To travel or not to travel

Currently, there are a number of travel guidelines published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well as state governments. In both Maryland and Virginia, the governors have asked residents of the state to postpone or cancel travel plans, specifically in those areas with spiking COVID-19 metrics. Below are the resources that provide detailed information to individual counties' current statistics, including the positivity rates for the specific areas.

Maryland Coronavirus Locality Resource

<https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>

Virginia Coronavirus Locality Resource

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus/covid-19-in-virginia-locality/>

Centers for Disease Control (other states' resources)

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>

Additionally, NLCS provides team members a COVID-19 travel policy that includes directives on what needs to be communicated with coaches prior to travel, and our communities provide guidelines to residents who choose to travel outside of their local area. Please familiarize yourself with the policies and guidelines in place, prior to your departure. In some situations, residents or team members may be asked to quarantine upon return. If you must travel, consider limiting interactions with others for 14 days before departure and encourage your family members to do the same.

To gather or not to gather _____

Both the CDC and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have encouraged older adults to avoid gatherings with those outside of their immediate households. CMS has asked those working with older adults to follow the same recommendations. NLCS is following these recommendations, encouraging residents and team members not to gather with individuals outside of immediate households. However, if you do decide to gather, here are a few reminders:

- Always practice the three Ws, but it's even more important when you'll be around others:
 - ✓ **Wear** masks whenever you interact with another person.
 - ✓ **Wash** your hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Additionally, single-use towels should be used to dry your hands after washing.
 - ✓ **Watch** your distance. Whether indoors or outdoors, maintain as much distance (at least 6 feet) between yourself and others. It is also essential to avoid hugs and handshakes.
- Minimize interactions by spending short periods of time with smaller groups of people, outside if possible, and avoiding long, indoor gatherings.
- If any visitors are inside your home, be certain to disinfect surface often and limit areas to which visitors have access.
- Get your annual flu shot at least two weeks before you leave. Encourage your family members to get the flu shot, too.
- Know what to expect at the holiday gathering and make a plan for how you will limit your contact with others while there. Think ahead about where you will sit and how you might limit contact with others. Check in with your hosts to be sure no one has an acute respiratory illness, and that no one has had close contact with a person with COVID-19 diagnosed within the past 14 days.

Returning from your travel or gathering _____

- Please ensure you follow the guidelines in place at your community that outline actions you are expected to take when returning from travel or after attending a gathering with those from outside of your immediate household.
- For residents, quarantining in your apartment, cottage or room for 14 days after returning is the safest option to prevent the spread of disease. Team members will quarantine at home, if necessary.
- Monitor for any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. If you start to have any of the symptoms, isolate from others and get tested. Additionally, you should stay in communication with those who attended the same gathering for the following 14 days to support contact tracing in the event that symptoms of COVID-19 occur for yourself or others.

Creating new traditions

While this year has forced us to put some of our old traditions on hold, it also gives us the opportunity to create exciting new traditions that fit our “next” normal needs. We also know that a number among our organization will have limited interactions with family throughout the holiday season because of COVID-19 visitation restrictions. The tips below can assist in inventing new traditions this holiday season.

- **Bring family to you with a scheduled video call.** If your loved ones are reconsidering plans to visit for the holidays, offer them an alternative: a virtual gathering. And why wait for the holidays? Start a monthly, bi-weekly, or even weekly video call with family and friends.
- **Start a shared photo album.** Google Photos, Dropbox, and Apple’s Shared Albums all provide simple, user-friendly ways to share photos with friends and family. Share memories in real time, comment on each other’s escapades, and recreate the feeling of sitting over a book of family photos.
- **Make a family holiday playlist** using a service like Spotify and have each family member add their favorite holiday songs.
- **Create a family recipe share**, which is especially good for families who usually celebrate with potluck dinners. Everyone can share their recipes so each household can replicate the meal.
- **Record a video of yourself reading a holiday bedtime story**, such as “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” or “The Polar Express” for your grandchildren to enjoy throughout the season. Apps like Marco Polo are great for this.
- If you cannot attend your usual religious services together, **have a virtual meeting to read the Christmas story and sing your favorite Christmas carols.**

With gratitude

It is with gratitude that we recognize the sacrifices residents, clients and team members as well as all of our families continue to make during this pandemic. The actions that we take together to continually practice our “Love Your Neighbor” pledge exemplifies our commitment to one another and to mitigating the spread of the coronavirus.

Resources

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/covid-facility-holiday-recommendations.pdf>

<https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/total-health/health-tips/spread-cheer-while-keeping-yourself-and-others-healthy>