

November 9, 2020

PRESS RELEASE

Holiday Gatherings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Holidays are traditionally a time for folks to travel to visit friends and loved ones for celebrations. Thanksgiving is often one of the busiest travel days of the year, and Cape Cod is a popular destination for holiday gatherings. However, travel and gathering with people from outside your household presents unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, have released guidance for how to celebrate safely this year as we see COVID-19 cases rise both locally and across the country. The Town of Mashpee has had success keeping our infection rate low throughout the pandemic, and the Board of Health wants to make sure we continue that success as we move into the holiday season.

Although the COVID-19 transmission rate has remained relatively low in Mashpee, we have seen a distinct uptick in cases in the last three weeks. The Mashpee Board of Health would like our residents to remain vigilant as we transition into the fall and winter season, when people are less likely to spend time outside as the weather cools. Please continue to wear face coverings when out in public, and anytime you cannot be more than six feet away from others. Social distancing is a crucial component to stopping the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, social distancing is difficult to do in many indoor environments. Please make a conscious effort to keep your holiday gatherings small, and preferably only with your household members.

This is the time to be creative with your planning. Many people may be concerned about family members feeling isolated during the holidays. Come up with ways to spread holiday cheer without spreading the coronavirus. Rather than inviting your parents or grandparents to dinner, deliver food to them so they have a hot meal. Offer to help hang outdoor decorations, and spend some time outside together. Coordinate a virtual dinner table for Thanksgiving, so everyone can be together even though physically apart. There are many ways to keep traditions alive, while making sure that your friends and family stay safe and healthy.

For those that have students in college, it may be difficult to stay socially distant when they come home for the holidays. To reduce the risk of students bringing the virus home with them, urge your student to “quarantine” from social gatherings for two weeks before coming home. While there are no “Stop the Spread” test sites on-Cape, there are many testing options locally. In Mashpee, the Community Health Center provides COVID-19 testing without a referral, although an appointment is required. For tribal members, the Mashpee Wampanoag Health Service Unit provides testing for members of any federally-recognized tribe with no referral necessary. There are also nearby testing locations at the CVS Pharmacy and ConvenientMD urgent care center in Falmouth. Cape Cod Healthcare offers COVID-19 testing at various locations, so talk to your primary care physician for additional options. Please be aware that anyone traveling to Massachusetts from a high-risk state is required to quarantine for 14 days, unless they test negative for COVID-19. For more detailed information, please visit www.mass.gov/matraveler.

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Furthermore, our Mashpee long-term care facilities have done a phenomenal job keeping our most vulnerable residents safe during the pandemic. During the holiday season, family members often visit their loved ones in nursing homes to catch up on life events and spread some cheer. This has been an especially trying year for our folks in long-term care facilities, and we cannot discount how important these visits are for self-esteem and social engagement. Please be mindful of your actions this year before paying a visit to a loved one in one of our local nursing homes. Limit social interactions with others before a visit, wash your hands often, and if you have any symptoms reschedule your visit.

On a final note, we know how difficult it can be to wear a mask everywhere. Staying home when you want to meet up with friends from out-of-town can be disheartening. But we at the Mashpee Board of Health want to thank you all for everything that you have done over the last nine months to keep our community safe. We take your calls, we follow up on complaints, and we answer your questions. We know that everyone has done their part to keep our Mashpee businesses open, and to allow our children to go back to school. You have been asked to do a lot, and we humbly ask that you do a little bit more. We are a strong community, and we are stronger together (while staying apart!).

Thank you, and stay safe.

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