

# COVID-19 Holiday Travel Guide: Planning Your Trip Home During the Pandemic



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### **Key takeaways:**

- Staying home and keeping everything virtual is the best way to protect yourself and others from getting infected or spreading the virus.
- Some cities, counties, states, and countries have put travel restrictions into place that may limit your ability to visit, or they may require mandatory quarantine or testing.
- Pack the essentials like masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and any other supplies to protect yourself and others.
- Plan ahead and make sure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to wearing masks, social distancing, and preparing for family gatherings.

**A**s we approach the holidays, you may be weighing the pros and cons of getting together with friends and family to celebrate. But given that we are still in the middle of a pandemic and cases continue to rise, there are a number of factors to consider.

Although small private gatherings may seem relatively safe, they have been the source of [COVID-19 outbreaks](#) over the summer and into the fall. And even though outdoor events tend to be less risky, cooler temperatures and winter weather will likely move most gatherings indoors.

While nonessential travel isn't encouraged, you may decide that you can manage the risks. Here we'll review what you should know if you are traveling during the holidays.

## **What the experts say about holiday travel**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)), in-person gatherings can have varying amounts of risk. The number of guests, the amount of time spent together, and where the event is being held all contribute to how risky it might be.

Keeping everything virtual is the least risky way to celebrate. Although it may not be ideal, it is the safest way to prevent the virus from spreading to you or others. As events move indoors and more people are added without ways to consistently social distance or wear masks, they can suddenly become very risky.

You can read more about the CDC's recommendations for holiday celebrations [here](#). Keep in mind that these recommendations are meant to supplement, not replace, any local requirements and regulations.

But even if you decide to travel, it may be difficult depending on where you are headed. Currently, there are travel restrictions to countries outside of the United States, as well as between different areas within the country. More on this next.

## **What travel restrictions are currently in effect?**

In an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, certain areas have put travel restrictions into place based on where you are coming from. Restrictions can be specific to a city, tribal community, county, state, territory, or foreign country. They can include measures like:

- A complete ban on nonessential travel into the area
- Mandatory quarantine upon arrival or return
- Proof of a negative test result

If you are traveling outside of where you live, you'll want to familiarize yourself with any requirements prior to arrival. Since restrictions and affected areas can change, it is best to confirm just prior to your departure.

### **Travel within the United States**

If you are traveling from a high-risk area for COVID-19, your travel may very likely be restricted, or you'll need to meet certain requirements upon arrival. In fact, [almost half of states](#) currently have these types of measures in place for visitors. While some are voluntary, others are mandatory and carry hefty fines for failure to comply. You'll want to check your destination state's website for information on travel restrictions as you are planning your trip.

Here are some of the restrictions in place in the U.S.

#### **Mandatory self-quarantine**

One of the more common measures is a mandatory 14-day quarantine when you get to the area. While some states and cities like [Chicago](#) have quarantine requirements for people coming from high-risk areas only, others extend to any outside visitor.

In some cases, you may be able to show proof of a recent negative test result as an alternative to self-quarantine. In late October, [New York](#) announced the ability for people to "test out" of the mandatory quarantine. In this case, you'll need to test within 3 days before leaving for New York, quarantine for 3 days after arrival, then test again. Once you've had two negative tests, then you can discontinue quarantine early.

And there may be requirements once you get back home, too. Your home state may also require a 14-day quarantine upon your return.

### **Proof of recent negative test result**

Some states, like [Alaska](#), require proof of a recent negative test result upon arrival, or you'll be required to pay \$250 for a test and quarantine until the results arrive. For a test to be considered recent, you'll typically need to get tested within 3 days of leaving for your trip. Additional testing may be recommended or required after you get there, too. For example, you may or may not need a second test depending on where you go in [Hawaii](#).

If you are trying to get tested before your trip, you'll want to find a location that offers voluntary testing options for travel purposes. Many sites only offer testing if you currently have COVID-19 symptoms or exposure risk, and those tests are normally covered by insurance.

But in the case of testing for travel, it might not be covered by insurance and you'll have to pay out of pocket. For example, you can schedule a [voluntary test](#) at CVS Pharmacy MinuteClinic for \$139, which is currently available in 31 states and districts.

You can search for testing sites near you [here](#), but you'll want to make sure that you don't need to meet screening requirements to be eligible.

### **Travel declaration**

In addition to self-quarantine and testing, some states also require a travel declaration or travel health form to be completed. You can generally access the necessary forms online if you are entering a state, but they may also be given to you at the airport if you are traveling by plane. Failure to submit these forms can have penalties. In New York, for example, [failure to submit](#) a travel form when leaving the airport can result in a \$10,000 fine.

### **International travel**

With the U.S. [leading the world](#) in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, other countries have restricted American visitors from entering to further limit the spread of the virus. Likewise, there are other high-risk countries that you probably shouldn't visit, even if it is allowed.

Here are some international travel restrictions and notices that are currently in place.

#### **Countries restricting travel from the U.S.**

In addition to travel restrictions across different states, other countries have also restricted visitors from the United States for nonessential travel. If you have an exception for traveling to one of these places like for work or study, you may need to submit a request to be allowed to enter the country. Countries currently restricting travel from the U.S. include, but are not limited to:

- [Canada](#)
- [Australia](#)
- [New Zealand](#)
- [Italy](#)
- [France](#)
- [Germany](#)

## Travel advisories for other countries

Although the U.S. does not currently have travel restrictions in place for its residents traveling to other countries or territories, the CDC has a list of [Travel Health Notices](#) advising against any nonessential travel to certain areas that are high risk for COVID-19. A few popular travel destinations that currently have travel advisories related to COVID-19 include:

- [Spain](#)
- [United Kingdom](#)
- [Costa Rica](#)
- [Bahamas](#)
- [British Virgin Islands](#)

If you do decide to travel to another country where travel is not restricted, you'll want to check the local policies since you may need to be tested, quarantine for a period of time, or meet other requirements upon entry. Additionally, some countries have put mandatory public health measures into place like curfews, masks, and social distancing that can result in fines and potential imprisonment if you do not follow them.

The State Department has country-specific information available [here](#), including entry and exit requirements, quarantine and testing information, and local resources.

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## What are the risks if you decide to travel?

The [main risk](#) associated with traveling is the possibility that you'll either contract the virus or spread it to others if you are infected. There are several factors that can make traveling more or less risky, so you'll want to weigh the risks and plan ahead. And while measures like wearing masks and social distancing can help limit exposure, they may not always be followed, especially if everyone isn't on the same page.

## Which groups are at higher risk of getting or spreading COVID-19?

If you are getting together with family, chances are you may be around people who are at [greater risk](#) of getting COVID-19 or ending up [in the hospital](#) with severe disease. These people can include, but are not limited to:

- Older relatives who can't fight off infections as well
- People with underlying conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes
- People with weakened immune systems

You may fall into one of the high-risk groups yourself, so traveling to areas with high infection rates can possibly have serious consequences if you catch the virus.

Since most COVID-19 cases seem to be asymptomatic or mild, you may be infected without realizing that you have the virus. Especially if you are coming from an area with an increasing number of cases, you may end up spreading the virus to others. Likewise, if you are traveling to a high-risk area, there may be a greater chance of catching it yourself.

### **What are the risks of different travel methods?**

The risk of traveling can also be influenced by how you are getting to your destination, as well as the length of your journey. Whether you are taking a 30-minute car ride or 3-hour flight, there can be varying degrees of risk. So which method is the riskiest, and how can you try to deal with the risks?

#### **Car**

First, let's review traveling by car. Factors like being in a car with people outside of your household, making any pit stops for gas or food, and traveling through high-risk areas can increase your risk.

A few things to keep in mind if you are driving for your trip:

- Plan your route since things may have changed since you last drove through an area, such as access to restrooms open to the public, dining options, and other considerations.
- Being in a car with people outside of your household can be risky, especially if it is a longer drive. If it is unavoidable, you'll want to wear masks, sit far apart, and try to improve ventilation by opening a window or using non-recirculation mode.
- Try to limit your pit stops by bringing water, snacks, and other necessities. If you need to stop for gas, you may want to pay at the pump with a credit card to avoid having to go inside and interact with others. Wear a mask if you need to go inside.
- Have disinfectant wipes handy to clean off any surfaces that you might touch, like the gas pump and pinpad.
- If you need to stop for food, you may want to opt for a drive-through option instead of sitting inside a restaurant.
- If you need to stop to use a restroom, wear a mask, make sure to wash your hands, and avoid touching faucets, door handles, and other frequently touched surfaces afterward.

#### **Plane**

Next, let's review traveling by plane. While sitting on a plane around other people can have risks, you've also got potential exposure from security lines and spending time in the airport terminal. Plus, there can be additional risks if you take public transportation or ridesharing services to get to and from the airport.

But it has been suggested that the risk of catching COVID-19 during an actual flight may be lower than you think, especially if all proper precautions are followed. The combination of mask requirements and how air is filtered and circulated throughout the cabin can make a big difference.

As with traveling by car, planning ahead and being prepared can help manage the risks of flying. Measures like wearing a mask, washing or sanitizing your hands, and keeping distance from others when possible are key while at the airport and on the plane. A few others things to know if you are flying:

- Try to limit your carry-on luggage so that you spend less time boarding and getting off the plane.
- You can bring up to 12 ounces of hand sanitizer in your carry-on bags as a temporary exception to size requirements for liquids. These do need to be screened separately as you go through security.

- Keep distance from others, stay seated if possible, and wear a mask at all times.
- When on the plane, turn the overhead air nozzle on fully and have it blowing downward directly towards your head. This is thought to create an environment where it is more difficult for you to inhale droplets containing the virus.

### **What about hotels?**

At some point, you'll reach your destination and need somewhere to stay. You may also need to stop at a hotel along the way. Hotels can have many surfaces that are frequently touched by others, so you'll want to know the updated cleaning policies and come prepared with disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer.

Here are a few tips for staying safe in hotels:

- Keep everything contactless (e.g., check-in, mobile room keys, payment) if possible.
- Avoid using public spaces like fitness centers, spas, saunas, pools, and dining areas.
- If you need food, opt for contactless room service if it is offered.
- Taking the stairs may be a better option to avoid riding in an elevator with others, or request a room on the first floor as an alternative.
- Wear a mask any time you are in contact with others or in public spaces.

If you are staying with friends or family, things can get complicated. While it is easy to get comfortable and become more lenient with wearing masks and social distancing, it is important to do everything that you can to minimize the risks. Especially if you or anyone else staying there is high risk, you'll want to take the proper precautions and make sure that everyone is on the same page.

### **General travel tips**

If one thing is clear, it is that deciding to travel during the pandemic requires a lot of thought and preparation. Ultimately, it is best to avoid traveling and getting together in person if you don't have to this year. Keep in mind that there is always risk with traveling, even if you are exercising caution. But if you do travel, below are some general tips to help you prepare.

#### **Be prepared and minimize risks**

- If you are feeling ill, do not travel or attend the event. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, contact your provider for next steps.
- Bring plenty of clean masks, disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer, and any other supplies.
- Make sure that you are not restricted from traveling to your destination and that you meet any requirements necessary for your arrival. Be familiar with any other requirements like wearing masks, curfews, or social distancing.
- Use contactless options whenever possible, and make sure that you are wearing a mask if you are in public spaces or in contact with other people.

- Consider having all attendees quarantine before the gathering to minimize the risk of spreading the virus, especially if you will be around older or other high-risk people.

### **After you get back**

- Your home state may require that you quarantine when you get back. You'll want to make sure that you plan accordingly and follow any requirements.
- If you traveled to a high-risk area or attended a large gathering, it would be a good idea to quarantine even if it isn't required. You may consider getting tested as well, but still exercise caution because the tests don't always catch all cases.