



COVID-19

HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Can I Socialize Safely with Friends?

Addressing the grey area of socializing with family and friends who aren't members of your household.

Of the many ways COVID-19 has changed life for Hawaii residents, physical distancing—in the land of aloha hugs and potlucks—is among the toughest to follow. It's only natural that, as fatigue sets in and guidelines extend into the indeterminate future, even well-intentioned people are looking for loopholes that allow them to reunite with loved ones.

But is there any safe way to see family or friends while following physical-distancing guidelines?

There is always risk.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that limiting face-to-face contact with those outside your household is the best way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This is especially important for people who are sick; know or suspect they've been exposed to COVID-19; are in a high-risk group like the elderly or immune-compromised; or live with someone who fits into any of these categories.

But you could get and spread COVID-19 even if you don't fall in one of these categories. There's no demographic that's truly safe from COVID-19—people of all ages have gotten seriously ill and died from the virus.

Given the risks and unknowns, the most responsible option is to have a social visit virtually.

But there's gray area

In a perfect infectious-disease-fighting model, everybody would stay home and socialize only with their household members and continue hosting virtual get-togethers. But the realities of human existence are messier.

Flagrant physical-distancing violations, like packed house parties, are unequivocally a bad idea. But there's plenty of gray area. Is there any harm in a physically-distanced hike or walk? If you live alone, can you see one or two friends? Is there a responsible way for parents to organize in-person playdates for their keiki?

There are also mental health ramifications to consider. Isolation can take a serious toll on mental health, particularly for those already suffering from conditions like depression and anxiety. Unemployment, isolation, and distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to about 75,000 additional “deaths of despair”—those related to suicide or substance misuse—in the U.S., according to a recent study. How do you weigh that against the risk of spreading a deadly infectious disease?

To help, we encourage individuals and families to use a harm-reduction approach to physical distancing, to minimize the negative consequences of potentially risky behaviors. That would mean teaching people how to see their loved ones as safely as possible, rather than telling them not to socialize at all.

7 tips for socializing safely – Hawaii-style



For some, physical distancing is truly an all-or-nothing, life-or-death situation. However, it's not always a simple, black-and-white situation, and there are grey areas to address. Here are seven tips to help you navigate risks when deciding to get together in-person with friends:

- 1) Meet outdoors. Bring beach towels or lawn chairs. If you're meeting in a backyard, find a way for friends to access your yard without going through your house. If you live in an apartment, invite friends to meet at a park. Maintain 6-foot distancing outside with those who are not household members.
- 2) Keep your get together small. Every additional person you invite increases the risk of exposure for everyone in the group.
- 3) Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet apart and wear a face mask. If physical distancing cannot be observed or if you expect to be around crowds, consider getting together at another location.
- 4) Plan to bring your own bento or plate lunch instead of holding potlucks. It's safest to have each family bring their own food, drinks, and snacks. Don't share glasses or utensils. Don't pass around a bowl of snacks or use a common serving spoon. If someone didn't get the memo and brought something to share, such as chips and dips, put them in individual serving bowls for each family. As you remove your face mask to eat or drink, remember to maintain a safe distance.
- 5) Greet others with waves and shakas. But don't hug, kiss or shake hands. If loved ones who aren't apart of your household insist on a hug, remind them of the risk involved.
- 6) Keep an eye on the keiki. Young kids may not follow physical distancing guidelines, so start small with just one other family. You can make physical distancing more fun by involving kids. For example, have them draw a chalk outline of six feet around their family's seating area. Always be a model for them, so they know what physical distancing looks and feels like.
- 7) Bring hand wipes or sanitizer. Ask each guest to take note of the surfaces they touch and use hand sanitizer before eating.