Christmas, New Year and COVID? Tips on safer ways for the holidays

TecSalud specialists share their recommendations on how to celebrate the holidays safely and prevent a fourth wave of COVID-19.
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It’s important to follow **preventive measures** and **get vaccinated** so we can celebrate **Christmas, New Year's parties** and the **holidays more safely** and prevent a fourth wave of COVID-19, said **Dr. Guillermo Torre,** Rector of **TecSalud**.

*“Countries like Mexico shut down from **December 12 to January 6**. We’re gregarious people, so we want to see family, friends, and religious communities. We want to protect each other, and we want to be together,”* said Dr. Torre.

Torre, who is also Vice President for Research at Tec de Monterrey, shared these **measures** for **reducing the risk of COVID-19 infections** due to the emergence of the **Omicron variant** of the virus, as well as the arrival of winter.

1. Get vaccinated against COVID-19

Whether you're going to see people or not over the holidays, make sure you have the full schedule of vaccinations, more so if you belong to a **vulnerable group**, such as being over the age of 60 or having a **comorbidity** such as **diabetes** or **hypertension**.

"(We should) step up vaccinations, have full schedules of vaccines," said Dr. Torre.

The current recommendation is also for an **additional dose** or **booster shot**.

He added that no TecSalud employee has been hospitalized due to COVID since vaccinations began.

“No-one has been hospitalized. For me, that’s overwhelming proof that the vaccine works.”

2. Avoid get-togethers in enclosed spaces

COVID-19 is mainly transmitted **through the air** that you breathe out or in.

You catch the virus when **invisible particles of SARS-CoV-2** enter your **nose, mouth,** and to a lesser extent, your **eyes.**

To do so, the air you’re breathing has to have a viral load from **someone nearby** who is **infected (even if they’re unaware of it and don’t show any symptoms).**

*“Try to **socialize in open spaces** as much as possible,”* said Dr. Torre.

3. If you’re in an enclosed space: ventilation and small groups

With diseases such as COVID, **the more enclosed and less ventilated** a place is, and **the more people close together** there are, **the more risk there is in the air** you breathe.

What’s more, try to ensure that there are as few people as possible at any get-togethers.

*“**Smaller groups, ventilated spaces,** keep your distance, and if you’re a vulnerable person, avoid situations of risk more than others,”* said Dr. Torre.

As far as possible, **avoid staying for a long time** in enclosed spaces or try to keep **doors and/or windows open** to keep the **air circulating.**

4. Wear face masks correctly

Dr. Torre emphasized that one basic measure is the **correct use of face masks.**

“Wear a face mask that covers your nose,” said Dr. Torre.

Your face mask has to fit properly. It should **fully cover the bridge of your nose and** cover **2 to 3 fingers below your lips.** If you wear **glasses and they steam up, your face mask doesn’t have a good seal.** If it’s an **N95 face mask,** you’ll know it’s **well-fitted** if it **expands** when you **inhale and exhale.**

You should wear a **double face mask** for greater protection.

If you’ve already been vaccinated, you should still wear a face mask to prevent you from getting infected.

5. Keep your distance and avoid physical contact

The measurement for social distancing is at least **1.5 meters from one person to another.**

Avoid greeting people who don’t live in the same house as you **with handshakes, kisses, or hugs.** You can use your **elbows, fists,** or **feet** as ways to greet people.

If you have to sneeze or cough, use **“sneezing etiquette.”** Don’t sneeze into your hands or into the air.

6. Wash your hands often

You should **wash your hands frequently with soap and water** for at least **40 to 60 seconds** or use an **alcohol-based hand sanitizer** with 70% alcohol.

Dr. Torre stressed that **hand washing** does work in conjunction with all the other preventive measures.

*“Face masks work. I’d emphasize that **hand washing (works),** even in a context with a high risk of exposure. It’s very important to stress that,”* he said.

7. Avoid being in crowded places

As far as possible, avoid being in places with a high concentration of people, above all in **enclosed spaces.**

One study shows that COVID transmission rises in places where people speak **loudly, shout, or sing**, such as concerts or sports events.

8. Get vaccinated against influenza

One additional measure for this season is to **get vaccinated against influenza**, said **Dr. Michel Martínez**, head of the TecSalud Epidemiological Surveillance Unit.

*"(**Getting vaccinated against influenza**) removes that distracting factor of an upper and lower respiratory infection that could be **confused with COVID-19**,"* said Dr. Martínez.

It can be administered at the same time as the **COVID vaccine** but should be injected in the **other arm.**

> ***"If we're more prudent and vigilant (about the preventive measures), people can protect themselves from Omicron or any other COVID variant." - Dr. Guillermo Torre***

9. Stay at home if you have any symptoms

As far as possible, **avoid get-togethers** over the holidays, more so **if you show any symptoms** of COVID, said Dr. Reynaldo Lara, an infectious disease specialist at TecSalud.

*"If you have any symptoms, if you're in any pain, you have to **think of your loved ones.** That's the most important thing, **raising awareness** of how to look after*

those around you over the holidays," said Dr. Lara.

10. Get medical help if you think you've been infected

People with a fever, headache, general malaise, loss of taste and smell, or diarrhea may have been infected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, said Dr. Lara.

If so, they should **get medical help** to determine whether it is necessary to take a **test to detect** COVID-19.

"An early and timely COVID diagnosis allows you to make certain decisions, such as monitoring your blood oxygen levels and establishing precautions for other people," he said.

11. Be socially responsible to prevent infections

Following these **preventive measures**, as well as **isolating** or **taking a test** if you suspect you've caught COVID-19, has **repercussions on society,** said Dr. Lara.

"(Following these measures) ***is how we're going to protect*** *our colleagues, our friends, and our families.* ***I urge you to look after yourselves and look after your loved ones****,"* he said.

"If we're ***more prudent and vigilant*** *(about the* ***preventive measures****) we've been talking about for the past 2 years, people can protect themselves from Omicron or any other COVID variant,"* concluded Dr. Torre.