



CIRCULAR NO H 223 /2020

TO: ALL HEADS OF DIVISIONS / DIRECTORATES / CHIEF DIRECTORATES / HEADS OF INSTITUTIONS / REGIONS / DISTRICTS AND SUB-STRUCTURES

HEALTH DEPARTMENT ADVICE ON SOCIAL GATHERINGS DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON

Social gatherings are one of the main ways the coronavirus spreads, because people can pass on the infection to many others at events, even if they don't feel sick themselves. With COVID-19 cases in the Western Cape province rapidly increasing again, we need to think of ways to connect and celebrate while keeping ourselves, our families, and our communities safe from the virus. Remember, even if you are young and healthy, you can pass the infection on to more vulnerable family and friends who may get very sick or die.

We are currently in a Second Wave of Covid-19: this is a time of **high risk for coronavirus infection.**

You risk becoming infected with coronavirus every time you meet with others.

Guidelines to make social gatherings less risky

- Be selective: Choose to attend only the most important social gatherings to create a healthy balance between socialising and safety.
- Know the facts: There is no such thing as a safe gathering. If you must meet, make safer choices by keeping it small, short and outside.
- Bear in mind that drinking alcohol increases your risk of engaging in unsafe behaviours: if you decide to drink alcohol, alternate between drinking alcohol and water to limit how much you are drinking.

Go spacious:

- Limit the number of people at a gathering to provide enough space between people.
- Maintain good social distancing (stay 1.5 metres apart) even if outdoors
- Avoid handshakes, hugs and kisses

Go virtual:

- Have virtual gatherings rather than in-person gatherings
- Set a time limit for virtual gatherings so that people don't feel awkward.
- Plan an activity – like a quiz, showing off DIY projects, dressing up, or watching a show together.

Go smaller:

- Do not attend gatherings where many people from different households will be in close contact, shouting, singing or exercising in groups.

Go outdoors:

- Meet outdoors whenever possible
- Consider going for a walk with friends or family, rather than gathering for a meal
- Bring the outdoors inside. Open all the doors and windows that you can.

Share time together, not the virus:

- Wear a mask at all times (even if outdoors) when not eating.
- As soon as you have finished eating, put your mask back on.
- Make sure that everyone washes their hands when arriving at the gathering, and frequently during the gathering. Bring your hand sanitizer with you to the event.
- Do not share cups, plates or cutlery.
- Where possible, people should bring their own food and avoid sharing of food.
- Keep the music low, so that people don't have to raise their voices to be heard (shouting increases the risk of spreading the virus).
- Make sure tables, chairs and other surfaces are cleaned before and after the event.

Guidelines to make hosting gatherings less risky

- Think about whether hosting an event is necessary and worth the risk of one of your guests becoming ill with COVID-19.
- Postpone traditional gatherings to a safer time, when coronavirus cases are not rising so rapidly. If you cannot postpone the gathering, then following the guidelines below can help to make hosting a gathering less risky:

Before the Social Gathering:

- Limit the number of guests. The smaller the gathering the lower the risks for everyone.
- Host your gathering outdoors if possible. If indoors, make sure the all doors and windows are open to get good ventilation.
- Arrange tables and chairs 2m apart. People from the same household can be in groups together and 2m away from other families.
- Remind people to bring masks and have a few clean spare ones available.
- Provide hand sanitiser in addition to clearly marked hand washing areas.
- Use single-use hand towels or paper towels for drying hands, so guests do not share a towel.
- 24 hours before the gathering: Remind guests to stay home if they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or if they are feeling sick (any sickness).

During the Social Gathering:

- When guests arrive, don't shake hands or hug, wave and greet them with words instead.
- Remind guests to wash their hands before serving or eating food.
- Lead the way by removing your mask to eat, and then putting it back on.
- If socially acceptable for the type of gathering, then ask people to bring their own food
- If serving food, ask one person to serve all the food so that many people are not touching the same serving implements.

After the Social Gathering:

- Use gloves when cleaning and throwing away rubbish after the gathering. Wash your hands well after taking off the gloves.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (e.g. door handles, taps, tables, chairs, counters, light switches, towels) and shared items (e.g. condiment containers) after the gathering.

It's hard work to be a host during COVID-19 times!

Strongly consider postponing events and gatherings until a safer time.

Who should NOT attend Social Gatherings?

You should NOT attend a Social Gathering if:

- You have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have not completed your isolation period of 10 days.
- You feel sick (any sickness).
- You are waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- You have been with someone who has COVID-19 in the last 10 days.

Who should AVOID Social Gatherings, where possible?

- People who are older than 60 years
- People of any age with Diabetes

If you are older than 60 years and if you have diabetes then you are at very high risk of getting severe COVID-19 and possibly dying.

'Risk 'Robot' for Social Gatherings

Lower risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gathering virtually (online) instead of in-person• Gathering in-person only with members of your own household (i.e. people you live with in the same house)• Gathering outdoors with good social distancing, mask-wearing, and hand hygiene• Gathering in-person for a short time (less than 1 hour)
Greater risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gathering with people from another household• Gathering indoors with good ventilation (doors and windows open)• Gathering for a moderate time (1 - 2 hours)
Highest risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gathering with people from several households• Gathering indoors with poor ventilation (no air from outside)• Gathering for a long time (more than 2 hours)• Having people attend your gathering who are not cautious in their daily lives (i.e. don't wear a mask, don't social distance, don't wash their hands regularly)• People drinking alcohol at the gathering• People singing or shouting at the gathering



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