Can we have summer parties during the pandemic?
42 ways to minimize the risk


Safe and sane Fourth of July celebrations used to be about managing fireworks and sparklers. Nowadays, the bigger question is whether it’s safe or sane for friends and family to gather during a pandemic.

With more and more people venturing out in public, the answer is personal: You must weigh the risk versus the reward, and plan carefully to minimize exposure to COVID-19.

Technically, any gatherings that bring multiple households together have been prohibited in California since March 19, except for faith-based services, cultural ceremonies and protests, and health officials certainly aren’t encouraging such events, especially since disease transmission rates are on the rise in many states, including California. But the health experts we talked to are also realists.

“I’m a virologist, so I could start out by saying, ‘People should not have parties now,’ but I know that’s not going to happen,” said Paula Cannon, a professor of microbiology at USC’s Keck School of Medicine, “so we might as well tell people the safest ways to do it.”

Translation? You can’t have 50-plus people crammed around the pool this year, passing around communal carafes of sangria or raspberry iced tea. It means banishing the chip and salsa bowls, using designated servers for all food and drink and assigning guests to eat at tables segregated by household.

It means keeping everyone outside, where the novel coronavirus is less likely to spread. And it also means whittling the guest list down to the number of people you can safely keep at least six feet apart in your yard and inviting only those you can trust to follow your rules.

“I give people permission to be picky this year,” Cannon said. “It’s an OK time to leave people off your invite list if you don’t feel they will contribute to your goal of keeping everyone safe.”

For instance, if you have family or friends who are vocal about their opposition to wearing masks, “My view is, ‘I’m so glad you’ve outed yourself,’” Cannon said. “You can tell them, ‘I can’t wait to see you next year, but this year, I’m just going to hang with people who care more about me than a little piece of cloth on their face.’”

These days, party planning must be all about managing risk and advance communications with all your guests, said Anne Rimoin, a professor of epidemiology at UCLA who specializes in emerging infectious diseases.

The coronavirus can lie dormant for 10 days to two weeks before an infected person gets sick, and some people can be infected without showing any symptoms, which is why taking temperatures is not a foolproof way to determine whether your guests are virus-free, Rimoin and Cannon said. (A family in Texas has reportedly seen 18 members infected with coronavirus after one infected relative interacted with other guests at an indoor surprise birthday party.)

If you are bringing outsiders into your household, you want to minimize exposure to the droplets people produce when they talk, shout, laugh, sneeze or cough, which is why experts recommend social distancing of six feet or more between people and wearing masks to reduce the dispersal of droplets. It also means limiting the number of people who touch common items, such as serving spoons, spigots, bottle openers and doorknobs.
“The safest thing is to stay isolated, but that’s not good for our mental health,” Rimoin said, “so the bottom line is yes, you can see your friends and family, but you have to put a lot of planning and effort into it and be very cognizant of the risk. ... Staying safe is all about time, space, people and place. You need to think about who you’re inviting and what’s their level of risk, not just for yourself but for everybody else you live with and want to see.”

That’s part of the getting-back-out-there challenge with the coronavirus, Rimoin said. “You always need to think about how your behavior affects others.”

For instance, Rimoin had a birthday last week. Ordinarily, she would have had a big party, but this time, she had to pick the one thing she cared about most: “I wanted to see my mom.”

Her mother, MaryAnn, is in her late 70s, and particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus, so a visit meant Rimoin had to isolate herself for two weeks beforehand to be sure she hadn’t been exposed to anyone with the disease and that she wasn’t at risk of passing it along to her mom. Isolating was inconvenient, she said, but every time she looks at a photo of her visit, “it makes me so happy... You just have to decide if the squeeze is worth the juice.”

So with those of warning and wisdom, here are 42 suggestions for “safer” summer party planning from the specialists plus Los Angeles-area caterers in the business of serving good food without making people sick: Jeanie Jackson, co-owner of JR’s Barbeque in Culver City; Stephan “Chefan” Houston, owner of Plate of Hue vegan catering in Compton; Jessica Huling, owner of Les Sisters Southern Kitchen & BBQ in Chatsworth; and Anna Rose Hopkins, co-owner of Hank and Bean catering in downtown L.A.

We’ve broken their tips into the eight most common party-planning hurdles: communication, timing, seating, food, drinks, mingling (or not), bathroom breaks and whether to jump into the pool.

Can we talk?
1. Talking with guests before the party is critical to its success, said Rimoin and Cannon, so everyone knows your expectations ahead of time. “If people arrive and think you’re imposing rules on them or picking on their children, bad feelings can arise,” Cannon said.
2. Ask guests for their input but decide ahead of time what items are non-negotiable, such as wearing a mask when mingling. “You have to ask, ‘Can you respect these rules and are you safe to join us?’” Rimoin said.
3. Ease the tension around wearing face coverings by buying white masks for all your guests and providing fabric markers or stickers at each household table for decorating them. An option is buying acrylic face shields as party favors.
4. Inform everyone that the party is outdoors only (except for bathroom visits, see below) and that it will be canceled in the event of bad weather.
5. Let guests know who else is coming so they can make their own assessments about their level of acceptable risk. Cannon said she recently turned down a graduation party at a close friend’s home because her husband is particularly vulnerable to the virus and she didn’t know the other guests. “They were doing all the right things with social distancing and being outside, but I just wasn’t comfortable with people I don’t know,” she said.
6. Don’t take offense. “You have to give people the freedom to politely turn you down,” Cannon said, “because we don’t always know what people’s home situation is. Accept a gracious refusal.”

Watching the clock
7. Maybe last year’s Fourth of July party lasted until the wee hours, but this year, it’s best to limit exposure to other people, so set an end time. Maybe your invite would specify, “Noon to 4 p.m.”
8. Set a clear schedule, Cannon said. Think of this more like planning a summer camp agenda than a free-for-all party.
9. Set a specific time for when food will be served. Even in nonpandemic times, it’s dangerous to keep food sitting outside for long, Jackson said. “I always specify the time for food, so if lunch is set for noon to 2 p.m., people don’t come looking for food at 3 p.m.”
10. Tell your guests the schedule ahead of time. That way, everyone knows when the food will be put away and when you plan to move chairs into a safe-distance circle for people to talk and mingle, masks on. (Some guests might prefer to come for just the mingling part. Knowing that will help you plan food accordingly.)

Take a seat
11. The size of your party should be dictated by how many people you can safely keep six feet apart in your yard.
12. Ideally, people from the same household should be assigned to their own table for eating, so they can comfortably take off their masks to eat.
13. Place disposable plates, cutlery, napkins, cups and straws on each table, so each household has what it needs, or put wrapped cutlery and straws at each place, Huling said. (You’re trying to minimize the need for guests to get up and go look for — and handle — items they’re likely to need or want.)

14. Provide everyone their own straw so they can more easily sip drinks from under their masks, Cannon said. (But do not cut holes in masks to drink; that defeats the purpose, Rimoin said.)

15. Table decor can still be fun. Be creative and add masks, hand sanitizer, and red, white and blue straws to your centerpieces. “It’s important to lighten the mood, so have fun with it,” Cannon said. “It’s a mistake to try to ignore what we’re all dealing with, and recognize that, yes, it’s a little absurd.”

It’s all about the food

16. Choose your designated servers before the party and make sure your recruits are willing to do the job. Asking people after they arrive can be awkward and lead to unreliable help, said Houston, who is hyper sensitive to keeping people safe since his mother, Betty Arnold, the inspiration for his vegan business, is a cancer survivor.

17. If your guests are bringing side dishes or salads, request that they bring them covered. Once they arrive, those dishes should be managed by only one designated server, who handles all the serving spoons and keeps food covered until it’s served. You don’t want multiple people touching the same utensils.

18. Designated servers should wear masks and disposable gloves while they’re serving food, the caterers say, so the good host will have an ample supply, such as inexpensive food-handler gloves or more substantial vinyl gloves.

19. Appoint a designated server to barbecue, another to manage the sides and salad table, and another to dole out appetizers, even chips and salsa, all to minimize the handling of communal items.

20. An option is to prep and pre-package everything, including the appetizers, Hopkins said.

21. Buy individual serving sizes, such as chip bags, so people can easily grab and go, and place extras on each household table.

22. If you are barbecuing burgers or hot dogs, create a plate of fixings — such as lettuce, tomato, pickles and onions, as well as mayo, mustard and ketchup — for each household table, to keep people from congregating.

23. Desserts should have a server (as opposed to people crowding around the dessert table), but this isn’t the best year for fancy cakes and pies. Instead, ask your guests to bring brownies or cookies pre-bagged into individual portions. If you must have a dessert buffet, provide a menu on each household table so people can put in their orders and the designated server can prepare and serve the individual plates.

On the rocks

24. No single-source containers, like kegs or pitchers or urns with a spigot, unless you have one person assigned to serve all drinks, said Houston.

25. The designated drink server can still mingle, Houston said, as long as everyone knows that he or she is the only one who can touch the drinks. “You just need to make sure that person is willing to do that throughout the party.”

26. The easiest and safest drink options are open coolers or tubs, one with bottled waters, another with sodas and another with beer or canned alcoholic beverages, so people don’t have to open a lid and root around.

27. Labeling coolers can cut down on unnecessary handling of items.

Get ready to mingle

28. When you invite people, suggest a safe greeting, such as elbow bumps or hip bumps, instead of hugs and handshakes.

29. Strategize with parents of young children about how to keep them from leaping on adults they haven’t seen for a while (like their grandparents) and badly want to hug, Cannon said.

30. Minglers must wear masks, until everyone is sitting six feet apart.

31. A fire pit might be a nice focal point to bring people together at a safe distance.

32. If people prefer to stay at their household tables, create “visitor” chairs six feet from each table, where people can stop by to talk.

33. Mark off the sitting area, even with squares on the ground, to ensure people keep their distance.

Time for a bathroom break

34. Banish cloth towels and bar soap from your bathroom and use liquid soap and paper towels to limit the spread of germs.

35. Provide enough garbage cans to hold discarded towels inside the bathroom and out, in case people want to (thoughtfully) use their towels when opening and closing the bathroom door. Do the same at the door that people will use to go in and out of your home.
36. Tell everyone in advance that the rest of the house is off limits.
37. Place hand sanitizer in the bathroom and at each household table.

Should you play in the pool?
38. There’s no evidence the virus spreads through chlorinated pool water, but pool play can still be risky because people will likely take off their masks, Rimoin said. “If people are spitting out big mouthfuls of water or chatting at close range in the shallow end, or just screaming and shouting, anything where you’re breathing heavily, that’s more likely to spread the virus.”
39. Talk to your guests with children ahead of time so they understand that people from different households should not engage in close-contact play.
40. Make a plan for helping kids remember this during the party when they forget (which they will).
41. If people want to use a flotation device, tell them it can’t be shared. If hosts want to provide floats, write names on each one so everyone knows whom each belong to.
42. Does this all feel a little much? Remember: The goal for get-togethers this year is to stay healthy while visiting with people we love. Rimoin said. “This isn’t forever; it’s just for a period of time, until we have all the tools to reopen society in a way that’s safe for everyone. And knowing that makes it a little more bearable.”

How Much Water Should You Drink, By The Numbers
We have all heard the adage that you need water. But why is water important for your body? And what are the benefits of water? We have answers to these questions along with the numbers on how much water you should be drinking so you can stay happy, healthy and hydrated.

What are the Benefits of Water?
Drinking water has many benefits and it is important for many functions in your body. First and foremost, your brain needs water to stay focused, motivated and keep a stable mood. Being dehydrated can reduce oxygen flow to your brain and simply be distracting from the task at hand. A dry mouth is more susceptible to bad breath and unpleasant tastes, which can even promote cavities. When you are dehydrated, your skin is less elastic. For this reason, skin that is chronically dehydrated is more prone to wrinkles (though drinking a ton of water does not prevent wrinkles).

Being dehydrated also takes a toll on your heart. When you have less water in your body, your blood volume is lower. This makes your heart work harder to get enough blood and oxygen to your organs and muscles, which is why exercising when dehydrated is so strenuous. Also, your blood vessels close to your skin’s surface expand to release heat when you are too warm. When you have lower blood flow, it takes a higher temperature to get your blood vessels to expand, so you stay hotter.

Contrary to popular belief, water is not directly responsible for muscle cramps, but it is related. When you are dehydrated, your muscles receive less oxygen and blood from your heart. This makes your muscles become more fatigued faster, and fatigue causes muscle cramps. Water does help remove waste from your muscles as they contract and lubricates your joints, so it is still crucial for exercise. The waste from your bloodstream is filtered through the kidneys and excreted, so being severely dehydrated can build up toxins in your kidneys and, in extreme cases, cause them to stop working.

How Much Water You Should Drink a Day, By The Numbers:
- 91: Number of ounces of liquid (from food and drink) most women need daily. Men, add 34 ounces. But this is an estimate. The best way to make sure you’re hydrated is to check your urine. It should be a very pale yellow. Darker? Drink up.
- 7-10: The number of ounces of water you should drink every 10 to 20 minutes during exercise. Aim for more the harder you work.
- 3: Pounds of water weight lost (from sweating or inadequate H2O intake) that can reduce attention span and cognitive function in a 150-pound person. Sweat rates vary, but you could lose this much exercising moderately for 90 minutes on a warm day.
- 37, 46, 17: Percentages of daily fluid the average American adult gets that comes from plain old H20, other beverages and food, respectively.

5 Easy Ways to Get Your Fill
- Sip iced tea or coffee. Even though caffeine can have the opposite effect, studies show that these sips are still hydrating.
- Jazz up your ice. Bored of tap? Freeze pureed strawberries, basil and lime juice in ice cube trays. Serve in seltzer.
- Raise a beer glass. Enjoying one low-alcohol brew (under 5% ABV) can be just as hydrating as H2O after exercise.
- Munch some cucumber. It’s 97 percent water, Strawberries and watermelon are other top picks at 91 percent.
- Slurp it. Make some soup and try garnishing with cukes.
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2020 Schedule

All support groups have been postponed until further notice.

If you have any questions please speak with Robin at 860-887-3561 ext. 124

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Fraud Surrounding COVID-19 is Increasing

As the number of people and communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic grows, so do the scams associated with it. Scammers use public health emergencies as opportunities for new fraud schemes, and because older adults are at greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19, they may target older populations.

There is currently no FDA-approved vaccine for COVID-19 and although there may be treatments for symptoms, there is no “cure.” However, scammers often use fear-based tactics to convince people that a vaccine or cure is now being offered.

It’s also important to remember that although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health officials may contact you if they believe you may have been exposed to the virus, they will not need to ask you for insurance or financial information.

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) recommends that Medicare beneficiaries:

- Contact your own doctor if you are experiencing potential symptoms of COVID-19.
- Do not give out your Medicare number, Social Security number, or personal information in response to unsolicited calls, texts, emails, home visits, or booths at health fairs and other public venues. If your personal information is compromised, it may be used in other fraud schemes as well.
- Be suspicious of anyone going door-to-door to offer free coronavirus or COVID-19 testing, supplies, or treatments.
- Carefully review your Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) or Explanation of Benefits (EOB), looking for errors or claims for products or services that weren’t received.
- Follow the instructions of your state or local government for other actions you should be taking in response to COVID-19.
- Contact your local SMP for help. SMPs empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers to prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse.

Your local SMP is ready to provide you with the information you need to PROTECT yourself from Medicare fraud, errors, and abuse; DETECT potential fraud, errors, and abuse; and REPORT your concerns. SMPs and their trained volunteers help educate and empower Medicare beneficiaries in the fight against health care fraud. Your SMP can help you with your questions, concerns, or complaints about potential fraud and abuse issues. Contact the Senior Medicare Patrol at your local Area Agency on Aging at 1-800-994-9422 or visit https://portal.ct.gov/DORS-SMP.
Alerta de la SMP sobre el fraude al consumidor: COVID-19

Los fraudes relacionados con el COVID-19 están aumentando

Conforme aumenta el número de personas y comunidades afectadas por la pandemia del COVID-19, también están aumentando las estafas relacionadas con la misma. Los estafadores usan las emergencias de salud pública como oportunidades para crear nuevos sistemas de fraude y, debido a que los adultos mayores tienen un riesgo más alto de enfermarse gravemente debido al COVID-19, los estafadores podrían enfocarse en esta población.

Actualmente, no existe ninguna vacuna aprobada por la Administración de Alimentos y Medicamentos de Estados Unidos (FDA, por sus siglas en inglés) contra el COVID-19 y, aunque puede haber tratamientos para los síntomas, no existe una "cura". Sin embargo, los estafadores a menudo usan tácticas basadas en el miedo para convencer a las personas de que ahora se está ofreciendo una vacuna o una cura.

También es importante recordar que aunque los Centros para el Control y la Prevención de Enfermedades (CDC, por sus siglas en inglés) y otros funcionarios de salud pública pueden comunicarse con usted si creen que es posible que haya estado expuesto/a al virus, no necesitarán pedirle su seguro ni su información financiera.

La Patrulla de Medicare para Adultos Mayores (Senior Medicare Patrol o SMP) recomienda lo siguiente para los beneficiarios de Medicare:

- Comuníquese con su médico si está experimentando posibles síntomas del COVID-19.
- No comparta su número de Medicare, su número de Seguro Social ni su información personal en respuesta a llamadas, mensajes de texto, correos electrónicos o visitas domiciliarias no solicitadas ni en stands en ferias de salud y otros lugares públicos. Si su información personal llegara a verse comprometida, también podría utilizarse en otros sistemas de fraude.
- Desconfíe de cualquier persona que esté yendo de puerta en puerta para ofrecer pruebas, suministros o tratamientos gratuitos para el coronavirus o el COVID-19.
- Revise cuidadosamente su Aviso de Resumen de Medicare (MSN, por sus siglas en inglés) o la Explicación de Beneficios (EOB, por sus siglas en inglés) y busque cualquier error o reclamo de productos o servicios que no haya recibido.
- Siga las instrucciones de su gobierno estatal o local para cualquier otra acción que usted debería estar tomando en respuesta al COVID-19.
- Comuníquese con su SMP local para obtener ayuda. Las SMP habilitan y ayudan a los beneficiarios de Medicare, a sus familias y a los cuidadores para prevenir, detectar y reportar fraudes, errores y abusos relacionados con la atención de salud.

La Patrulla de Medicare para Adultos Mayores (SMP, por sus siglas en inglés) está lista para brindarle la información que necesita para PROTEGERSE a sí mismo/a contra los fraudes, errores y abusos de Medicare, DETECTAR fraudes, errores y abusos potenciales y REPORTAR sus preocupaciones. Las SMP ayudan a educar y a empoderar a los beneficiarios de Medicare en la lucha en contra del fraude de atención de salud. Su SMP puede ayudarle con sus preguntas, inquietudes o quejas relacionadas con posibles instancias de fraude y abuso. También proporciona información y presentaciones educativas. Para encontrar su Patrulla de Medicare para Adultos Mayores local, llame al 1-800-994-9422 o visite https://portal.ct.gov/DORS-SMP.
We hope you find the July edition of our Caregiver newsletter informative.

Senior Resources currently produces a monthly caregiver newsletter. We are looking for feedback on any ideas you may have for future editions.

Please contact Robin Brewer with any ideas/suggestions or if you wish to be removed from our mailing list.

Robin Brewer: RBrewer@seniorresourcesec.org or 860 887-3561 x 124.

To read previous editions of this newsletter please visit: www.SeniorResourcesEC.org/stay-informed/caregiver-newsletter