From Camping to Dining Out: Here's How Experts Rate the Risks of 14 Summer Activities

https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/23/861325631/from-camping-to-dining-out-heres-how-experts-rate-the-risks-of-14-summer-activities

It has been around two months of quarantine for many of us. The urge to get out and enjoy the summer is real. But what’s safe? We asked a panel of infectious disease and public health experts to rate the risk of summer activities, from backyard gatherings to a day at the pool to sharing a vacation house with another household.

One big warning: Your personal risk depends on your age and health, the prevalence of the virus in your area and the precautions you take during any of these activities. Also, many areas continue to restrict the activities described here, so check your local laws.

And there’s no such thing as a zero-risk outing right now. As states begin allowing businesses and public areas to reopen, decisions about what’s safe will be up to individuals. It can help to think through the risks the way the experts do.

“We can think of transmission risk with a simple phrase: time, space, people, place,” explains Dr. William Miller, an epidemiologist at Ohio State University.

Here’s his rule of thumb: The more time you spend and the closer in space you are to any infected people, the higher your risk. Interacting with more people raises your risk, and indoor places are riskier than outdoors.

Dr. Emily Landon, a hospital epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist at University of Chicago Medicine, has her own shorthand: “Always choose outdoors over indoor, always choose masking over not masking and always choose more space for fewer people over a smaller space.”

Our experts shared their thoughts via phone and email interviews.

1. A BYOB backyard gathering with one other household: low to medium risk

Meeting in a spacious outdoor area with only a small group isn’t too risky. But our experts say that safety here depends on whom you invite and what their behaviors have been. “If you have a gathering with one other household that [has] followed social distancing, this would be a low-risk activity,” says Dr. Judith Guzman-Cottrill, a pediatric infectious disease expert at Oregon Health & Science University.

What alters risk? To lower risk, avoid sharing food, drinks or utensils — make it a BYO-everything party. Dr. Andrew Janowski, a pediatric infectious diseases expert at Washington University in St. Louis, notes that the food itself isn’t the risk but touching shared dishes or utensils could be.

Watch out for drinking, says Dr. Abraar Karan, a physician and public health researcher at Harvard Medical School, as it can make people sloppy about social distancing. It also increases the odds that people will want to use your bathroom. “Once you move into the house with others, the risk profile goes up,” he says.

Some experts suggest wearing a face covering, but Landon points out that you can’t realistically stay masked while eating and drinking. She suggests an alternative to a meal would be a backyard lawn tournament: That way, “the kids can play together but still with their masks on.” It could be fun for the grown-ups too.

2. Eating indoors at a restaurant: medium to high risk

Indoor dining “is still amongst the riskier things you can do,” Landon warns. The trouble is, says Miller, “people tend to linger in restaurants. So even if spacing is OK, the duration of exposure is longer.” Also, he says, talking “appears to lead to some release of the virus.”

Karan notes that one outbreak in Guangzhou, China, took place in a restaurant with no windows and poor ventilation, and the air conditioning appears to have blown droplets between tables.

What alters risk? Janowski says the risk level depends on how well the restaurant has adapted for the pandemic. Eateries should reduce and space out seating, require servers to wear masks and offer easy access to hand-washing stations. They should also provide single-use options for condiments so you don’t have to touch shared ones, says Janowski. And they should close all self-serve areas like soda fountains or buffet tables.

If you do go to a restaurant, look for outdoor seating, Landon says she would go with only members of her household, because “I don’t want to have to take my mask off in the close proximity of a bunch of other people.”

3. Attending a religious service indoors: high risk

Worship services involve people from different households coming together indoors for an extended time. “All of the ingredients are there for the potential of a lot of people becoming infected in the short amount of time,” says Kimberly Powers, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She points to outbreaks linked to churches: In one, 35 out of 92 people who attended a service at a rural Arkansas church developed COVID-19.

Singing — whether from the pews or the choir — is high risk, several experts noted, citing a study of a choir practice in Washington state where over half of attendees became infected.
Risk goes down if places of worship adapt, Guzman-Cottrill says. “My parish began having in-person services last week,” she says. The church had advanced sign-ups to limit attendance to 25 people. Attendees were required to be healthy, wear face coverings and sit at least 6 feet apart.

4. Spending the day at a popular beach or pool: low risk
As long as you can stay socially distanced, this could be a pretty safe activity, our experts say.

Landon says Miller’s key point is that the water is diluted. “The sheer volume of water will dilute out the virus, making the water a highly unlikely source of infection,” says Janowski.

What alters risk? Miller says the main risk comes from restrooms that are small, busy and poorly ventilated. It’s possible that your friend is infected but asymptomatic, says Rebecca Katz, director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University Medical Center.

Watch out for crowds at entry points and bathrooms. Maintain social distance both on land and in the water.

Landon says her biggest worry about pools and beaches is kids. At pools, “they make friends with everyone,” she says. “If you want to be able to see grandma for Sunday lunch, because that’s what’s really important to your family, then you don’t want your kids running around with other people’s kids.”

She says a beach is better than a pool in terms of space. Go early in the morning or late afternoon, when crowds are lower, and look for beaches that mark off spots for people to set up their areas.

5. An outdoor celebration such as a wedding with more than 10 guests: medium to high risk
Family-oriented celebrations are usually a summer tradition, but they come with a lot of risk right now. Many weddings have been postponed, with good reason.

“Outdoors reduces the risk, but as people are celebrating and drinking, it seems like they may not social distance as readily,” says Kahan, the Harvard physician. “These types of events end up being large crowds where people are having extended face-to-face conversations.”

The larger the guest list, the greater the potential that one of them is infected, says Powers, the UNC epidemiologist.

What alters risk? The danger varies greatly depending on the size of the gathering and how closely people gather.

If you are considering hosting a celebration, make it a small one with mostly local guests. “Bringing people from other communities” is high risk, says Landon, of the University of Chicago. “If people have to travel by car, by plane, from other places, you’re really asking for it.”

And really think twice about inviting your relatives, particularly older family members or those with underlying conditions. People may feel pressure to attend, even though it’s hazardous to their health — and even more so if you emphasize that you’re going to try to make it safe, says Landon. One of the largest clusters of deaths from the virus in Chicago occurred after a funeral in which one of the attendees spread it to many of his family members.

6. Using a public restroom: low to medium risk
Restrooms have been designed to prevent disease transmission, says Landon: “There are all sorts of things that you can catch from other people’s poop, and you almost never do, because they’re set up with all hard surfaces that can be cleaned.”

The risk depends on the number of local COVID-19 cases and how clean the bathroom is, says Janowski of Washington University, noting that a bathroom involves multiple high-touch surfaces.

There isn’t yet sufficient data to know if there’s risk from toilet flushes aerosolizing the virus. Landon says that other viruses, such as norovirus, can be aerosolized by flushing, but norovirus doesn’t often spread that way as long as bathrooms are cleaned. The CDC says it’s “unclear whether the virus found in feces may be capable of causing COVID-19.”

What alters risk? Miller says the main risk comes from restrooms that are small, busy and poorly ventilated — like “those restrooms in a gas station off the highway where the restroom is outside.”

Choose a bathroom that looks clean and is well stocked with supplies such as paper towels, soap and toilet paper. Avoid bunching up in a line to use the toilet or staying there long, if you’re within 6 feet of others. Wash your hands after you go, and use hand sanitizer on them if you need to touch any surfaces after that.

7. Letting a friend use your bathroom: low risk
Landon doesn’t think it’s a big risk: “What happens in the bathroom is going to be sucked out of the bathroom ventilation, and you can clean all the hard surfaces really easily.”

Miller agrees: “You can run the fan, leave the door open after (so air flows) and clean the bathroom later. And if you use the bathroom after they do, just wash your hands.”

What alters risk? It’s possible that your friend is infected but asymptomatic, says Janowski. “It would be reasonable to decontaminate the bathroom after a friend uses it, including cleaning the high-touch surfaces of the door, toilet and sink.”

8. Going to a vacation house with another family: low risk
Experts said that if both families have been quarantining and limiting their exposure to others, this is pretty safe. “If one family is very active or parents have higher-exposure jobs, then the risk increases,” Miller says.

Landon thinks this arrangement could be a good idea, especially if the house is “in the woods where you’re not going to have a lot of contact with other people,” she says.

What alters risk? Landon suggests talking with the other family beforehand to make sure you share the same expectations for the precautions everyone will take in the two weeks before arrival and while you’re there. Ensure that no one has signs of illness — if they do, they need to stay home. Miller recommends cleaning the major surfaces in the house on arrival. “And the more that people can reduce exposure in the days leading up to the trip, the better,” he adds.

9. Staying at a hotel: low to medium risk
The consensus is that staying at a hotel is relatively low risk, especially once you’re in your room. It’s best to limit your time in common areas such as the lobby, gym, restaurant and elevator, where the risk of exposure is higher.
What alters risk? Bring disinfecting wipes to wipe down the TV remote control and other common surfaces. You might also want to remove the bedspread since it may not be cleaned after every guest, suggests Miller. Ask about the hotel's cleaning policies, as many have new COVID-19 protocols. “ Beware of the elevators! Use the knuckle of your little or ring finger to press the buttons,” says Miller.

Other suggestions: Order room service rather than eating at the restaurant, avoid the exercise room and wear a face covering in public spaces.

10. Getting a haircut: medium to high risk
A haircut involves “close contact and breathing that is extended for several minutes,” Karan notes. “This is the primary mode of transmission that we know happens. And cloth masks certainly are not perfect for this.”

Janowski says this is one of the highest-risk scenarios on this list, because there’s no way to keep 6 feet from someone cutting your hair. “It all takes is [having] one asymptomatic but infected worker, and suddenly many customers are at high risk of infection,” he says.

What alters risk? Landon believes the risk is not terribly high if both you and your haircutter wear masks and if COVID-19 is not very prevalent in your area. Look for a salon or barbershop that has (and enforces) policies to protect its employees, like wearing protective gear and sanitizing hands; she says: “By protecting their employees, they’re protecting you too.” And make sure that your barber or stylist is all business, says Karan: “Stopping to chat at close distance like this is something we all love doing with our barbers normally. This is not the time for it.”

11. Going shopping at a mall: risk varies
How risky this is depends on what kind of mall it is, how crowded it is and how much time you spend there, our panel agreed. “Crowds with high density lead to substantial increase in risk,” says Miller. “The major mitigating factor is that people don’t mingle in a single place for long.”

What alters risk? Outdoor malls are preferable to indoor ones. And empty malls are better than crowded ones. Avoid the food court and go with purpose, not leisure, says Landon: “As much as you may like retail therapy, you should browse online before you go. Know what you’re going to pick up or try on. Wear your mask. Go in, look at it. Make your decision and get out.”

Be alert while you’re there to avoid close contact. “Maintain your space,” says Miller. “Try to go at off-peak hours.” Bring hand sanitizer, says Guzman-Cottrill, and use it frequently, especially if you touch any shared surfaces like handrails or elevator buttons.

12. Going to a nightclub: high risk
There is consensus among the experts that going to a nightclub is a very high-risk activity. Crowds, ultra-close contact, singing, sweating and inhibition-loosening alcohol are a potent cocktail of risk factors. When drinking, people become less compliant with rules, Miller says, and they may breathe heavier from the dancing — “which means more virus is being shed,” he says. If there’s an infected person in the mix, the virus can spread easily.

"This is a very high-risk situation for an outbreak, as we saw in South Korea just recently," says Karan, referring to an outbreak tied to several nightclubs and bars. "Don’t go to bars or clubs right now."

What alters risk? Nothing makes this a good idea right now. If you want to dance, have a dance party at home with the people in your intimate circle. If it’s a small outdoor gathering, dancing under the stars — 6 feet apart — would be much less risky too.

13. Going camping: low risk
As far as summer activities go, this is least risky from a virus perspective,” says Katz, of Georgetown. You’re outdoors and isolated. Miller agrees — but he says that if you’re going with a group, be sure you can trust your fellow campers. Have they been social distancing and following the guidelines? If not, they could be asymptomatic spreaders of the virus.

What alters risk? Of course, risks can creep in, depending on the particulars. “Are you camping in an isolated outdoor location with your family?” Katz asks — this is the lower-risk scenario. It’s more dangerous if you’re at a crowded campground with a shared restroom and communal picnic areas, she says. “Sleeping in tents together with others [not from your household] can certainly be a setup for transmission,” adds Karan.

Bottom line: The activity itself is low risk, but the people whom you’ll be in close contact with during the trip could increase the hazard.

14. Exercising outdoors: low risk
Unless you’re playing group sports, exercising outdoors is a good way to burn off steam while staying socially distant. Our experts agree that sports such as golf and tennis are safer than contact sports such as basketball and football. “I would personally avoid contact sports until we have a better sense of transmission risk here,” Karan says.

And running? “If you’re not on a crowded path where people are brushing past each other, then I think that’s a great form of exercise right now,” says Powers.

What alters risk? The more people involved in the activity, the higher the risk. It’s possible to spread the virus when you’re in close proximity to others — even if you’re asymptomatic — so it’s best to wear a mask if you can’t stay socially distanced.

The risk depends on the sport. A game like basketball is tricky, Landon says. “You’re touching the ball and you’re going to be breathing in each other's faces,” so she suggests playing only with people in your household. Tennis carries a much lower risk: “You’re far apart on either side. That’s definite social distancing,” she says.
May 27, 2020

Dear Partners and Friends,

Since the beginning of the public health crisis with COVID-19, our Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup (GrOW) members and our partners have been learning about the impact of this pandemic for kinship families. We are sending this letter to your organization, in collaboration with our national partners; Generations United and Collaborative Solutions, and the many kinship families across the country to share our heartfelt appreciation and concern for you during this difficult time.

We believe that it is urgent to construct a comprehensive data story of the needs and resiliency experienced by kinship caregivers and multi-generational families across the U.S. We would like to please ask for your help in reaching out to the families in your community networks to collect this information via an online survey:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PQK2HSH

We plan to keep the survey open until June 15, 2020. We would like to promptly share this information back to you and the broader community to inform how we can better support your work as a relative caregiver to children. Please reach out to aairesearch@gmail.com if you would like any additional information or if you are interested in participating in more opportunities to share your story.

Thank you for your collaboration!
With best wishes for wellness,

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The Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup (GrOW) is a national network of stakeholders that works across systems of care in support of kinship families. GrOW intentionally integrates the lived experiences of kinship caregivers in the evaluation methods, tools and resources it develops and shares. GrOW’s mission statement is to emphasize the importance of the application of evaluation tools to identify needs and support best practices in partnership with kinship families.

Generations United’s National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for families where children reside with and are being raised by grandparents, other relatives or close family friends. Center staff conduct federal policy advocacy, provide technical assistance to state-level practitioners and advocates, and raise aware about the strengths and needs of the families. Your responses to this survey will help inform and guide these advocacy efforts. For more information about Generations United and access to relevant fact sheets, tools and resources visit www.gu.org and www.grandfamilies.org.

Collaborative Solutions works in partnership for the empowerment of human service organizations and communities in order to positively impact special needs populations. The overall purpose and goal of our work is to impact the system of supportive housing throughout the United States to ensure that vulnerable populations are adequately housed and can access supportive services. Through the delivery of training, technical assistance, research, and targeted community initiatives; Collaborative Solutions is able to strategically build the capacity of local communities and various types of organizations, while also helping them maximize their long-term community impact in the areas of housing, health and services. https://collaborative-solutions.net/
Hartford Healthcare/Backus will provide Free – Walk-Up COVID TESTING OUTSIDE St. Vincent de Paul Place 120 Cliff Street, Norwich Wednesday, June 10th 9:00 am - 12:00 pm No Car Necessary - Results by Phone in 3-4 days Pre-registration encouraged, but not necessary Call SVdPP at 860-889-7374 or stop in at the front desk
New Guidance about COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Beneficiaries from Social Security Commissioner Andrew Saul

“The Treasury Department launched a new web tool allowing quick registration for Economic Impact Payments for eligible individuals who do not normally file a tax return, and also announced that it would begin making automatic payments. However, for some people receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration—specifically those who have dependent children under the age of 17—it is to their advantage to go to this portal to ensure they also get the $500 per dependent Economic Impact Payment. I encourage them to do this as soon as possible, and want to provide the following details:

People who receive Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability insurance benefits and who did not file a tax return for 2018 or 2019 and who have qualifying children under age 17 should now go to the IRS’s webpage at www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments to enter their information instead of waiting for their automatic $1,200 Economic Impact Payment. By taking proactive steps to enter information on the IRS website about them and their qualifying children, they will also receive the $500 per dependent child payment in addition to their $1,200 individual payment. If Social Security beneficiaries in this group do not provide their information to the IRS soon, they will have to wait to receive their $500 per qualifying child.

The same new guidance also applies to SSI recipients, especially those who have qualifying children under age 17. To receive the full amount of the Economic Impact Payments you and your family are eligible for, go to the IRS’s Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info page at www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments and provide information about yourself and your qualifying children.

Additionally, any new beneficiaries since January 1, 2020, of either Social Security or SSI benefits, who did not file a tax return for 2018 or 2019, will also need to go to the IRS’s Non-Filers website to enter their information.
Robin Brewer will be conducting a virtual support group in conjunction with the Norwich Youth and Family Services.

The virtual support group will be held: June 11th, June 25th, July 23rd, and August 27th.

Please contact Robin at 860-887-3561 ext. 124 for more information.

CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP
[You Are NOT Alone!]

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

Senior Resources
Agency on Aging

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This program is supported by Senior Resources-Agency on Aging with Title III funds made available under the Older American’s Act.
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 June edition of our Caregiver of Children newsletter informative.

Senior Resources currently produces a monthly caregiver of children 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/grandparent-newsletter