



November 21, 2020

Dear Fellow Marylander:

I love spending Thanksgiving with my extended family. I'm sure that you want to spend the holiday with your family, too. In a typical year, when we aren't fending off a global pandemic, upwards of [55 million Americans travel](#) to be with loved ones for Thanksgiving.

This year has to be different. As the number of [COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continues to escalate](#) in Maryland and almost every state nationwide, we all must realize that traditional family gatherings with large groups of people, who come from different households to share a meal, an afternoon or the long weekend, and some football, may be costly. In some instances, it may be deadly.

Following the advice of [public health professionals](#), this year, Myrna and I have cancelled our typically large family holiday.

Are you planning on COVID-19 testing to keep you safe before crowding 20 cousins around a dining room table for turkey? It's certainly a starting point, but when it comes to testing for COVID-19, timing is everything. A recent study in the medical journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* says that the number of [false negatives on Day 1 of infection is about 100 percent](#), with that number – thankfully – dropping down to about 20 percent on Day 3.

Will you skip testing and, instead, just check that everyone feels well? This approach isn't foolproof either. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that approximately 40 percent of infections are asymptomatic and [50 percent of transmissions happen before symptoms begin](#). "The virus just takes time to replicate in the body to detectable levels," Justin Lessler, professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health recently told CNN.

I say all this not to scare anyone, but to put the holiday in perspective. I urge you not to put you or your family and friends at risk by rushing into a situation that you may think is safe. This is no hoax. By the time you read this, about 12 million Americans will have been infected and more than 250,000 – including about 2,500 Marylanders – will have lost their life to this virus. "In less than 10 months, COVID-19 has killed more people than strokes, suicides and car crashes typically do in a full year – combined," [CNN reported](#) Wednesday when we hit the grim 250,000 mark. [NPR notes](#) that is "more than twice the number of U.S. service members killed in World War I."

Small gatherings, particularly ones held indoors, are becoming [super spreader events](#) because we let our guard down and fail to wear masks and stay at least six feet apart with the people we care about most.

Because of the way the COVID-19 virus spreads, through droplets that hang in the air, some scientists who are participating in contact tracing efforts estimate that [10 percent of people have been causing 80 percent of new infections](#). This is one of the reasons so many governors, including Gov. Larry Hogan, are reinstating [limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings](#) and strongly discouraging non-essential interstate travel.

The best advice is to stay home. Find a video conferencing platform that works best for you and your family, and enjoy the company despite the distances. A new survey by AAA says that [“almost 90% of Marylanders are planning to stay home for Thanksgiving,”](#) so you are in good company by playing it safe this year.

The CDC recommends Americans [avoid travel](#) this Thanksgiving. If you really, really cannot skip the holiday gathering, take precautions. Please. [The basics remain](#): wear a mask – make it a multi-layer, well-fitting one; stay at least 6 feet away from someone who doesn’t live with you; and wash your hands. Keep hand sanitizer handy when soap and water aren’t close by. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. [Make sure all your guests know what to expect](#) when they arrive, and try to keep your gathering small and outdoors.

This pandemic has been [isolating and lonely](#). It has been tough, devastating, really, for so many. Thanksgiving offers an opportunity for the connections and interactions that we all crave. But let’s stay smart and look out for each other a little bit longer.

Happy Thanksgiving! Stay home and stay safe.



Ben Cardin