

Messaging Toolkit for Schools: Celebrating the Holidays and Winter Break

The number of people with COVID-19 across the U.S. is growing, and experts expect these numbers to rise in the next few months. Governor Phil Scott put temporary measures into place to slow the spread of the virus in Vermont. This will protect hospitals from getting overwhelmed, help schools continue to offer in-person instruction, and keep as many people working as possible. We have revised this toolkit based on the [Nov. 13 executive order](#), and we encourage you to share these messages with families before the winter break.

Looking into a Hopeful Future

It has been a long and difficult time for families this year, and the pandemic is going to continue to challenge us in 2021. While the COVID-19 vaccine should offer protection from the virus, it will take time to vaccinate enough people to make a significant impact. When enough people in a community are immune to a disease, they protect others who are not vaccinated because there are fewer chances for the disease to spread. For the latest information on vaccine in Vermont, visit healthvermont.gov/covid19-vaccines.

What Families Need to Know

- The Health Department strongly advises against [non-essential](#) travel, even within Vermont. All travel to and from Vermont requires [quarantine](#).
- Vermonters are not allowed to socially [gather](#) with people they don't live with. This includes gathering both inside and outside, and in public and private spaces.
- Visitors to Vermont can only socialize with the people they are traveling with. They cannot gather with Vermonters in their home or elsewhere.

Plan to Stay Safe

For a lot of families, holiday celebrations are built around traditions that bring people together. After an extended time being apart, we need connection more than ever. However, our individual choices can have a large impact the health of our community in this pandemic. Last March, when schools and the economy shut down, we did not have choices about where we could go. Now we have more options, but making these decisions will affect others. All Vermonters should continue to follow this basic guidance:

- When you go out, like to run errands, visit a trail or something else, a quick and easy way to measure the [risk](#) is to look for these three [things](#): masks on faces, six-foot spaces, uncrowded places. If any of these things is missing, come back another time.
- If you're sick, stay home.
- Get [tested](#) if you have: [any symptoms](#) (even mild ones), been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19, traveled, or attended a social gathering.
- Get your [flu shot](#).

Manage Your Family's Risk

Many families will follow the guidance, and it's great to share appreciation for their sacrifices at this time. However, some will choose to travel, and some will gather with others, so they need information about what to do next. It's best to share this without shame or judgment – what's important is protecting one another.

- Get [tested](#) as soon as you can. Find out where to get tested [here](#).
- [Quarantine](#). You now need to complete either a 14-day quarantine or a 7-day quarantine followed by a negative test result, as long as you do not experience symptoms.
 - Quarantine means staying home and away from others. Do not go to work or school, or out to do errands or recreation. This helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 before a person knows they are sick, or if they are infected with the virus and don't have symptoms.

Messages to Share

Have compassion for people during this challenging time. It is hard to balance our risk of getting sick and our human need for in-person connection, especially during the holidays. We are asking the entire school community to break from holiday traditions with loved ones they may not have seen in-person for months. It's been a long, lonely pandemic, and people are craving normalcy. Acknowledging the challenges and disappointments that families are facing shows the school cares for the community.

- **When to Say Yes**
 - ✓ Find ways to adapt holiday traditions. Organize a no-contact cookie swap in your neighborhood, make a family tree and send cards to people you don't see.
 - ✓ Take a holiday lights walking or driving tour around your town. Take pictures and share with the hashtag #VermontLightsTheWay.
 - ✓ Express [gratitude](#) and give back to your community. Find a service project for the family to do together. Check with a local [food bank](#), or the [United Way](#) for ideas.
 - ✓ Practice [Random Acts of Kindness](#) – shovel a neighbor's driveway, deliver food, books, and games to families in quarantine.
 - ✓ Organize a virtual book or movie club.
 - ✓ Go outside and play in the snow. Take a walk, hike, go sledding.
 - ✓ Celebrate the winter solstice or plan a winter scavenger hunt and search for different types of trees, wildlife, stars (it gets dark early!).
- **Videos to share**

Please share these on your website and social media platforms.

Post Description	Links
Given the recent rise in COVID-19 cases, Vermont has announced new policies around social gatherings and travel. #StaySafeVT	Facebook YouTube

- Newsletter Drop-in

The 2020 holiday/winter break will be different for most of us, and we need to adjust. Family traditions that brought us together in the past may need to be adapted to keep people safe this year. We can still capture the spirit of the holidays if we get creative. There are so many ways to express love, gratitude and generosity that won't put your family or others at risk of getting sick. This is disappointing, but you can work to manage expectations ahead of time. Talk with your family about your time together and find ways to safely celebrate. With an open mind and a flexible plan, we will get through to the other side of this pandemic.

You can find more information on the Health Department's [website](#).

Images to Use

Sample images to use with the messages



Resources

- [COVID-19 in Vermont](#) (Department of Health)
- [Holiday celebrations](#) during COVID (CDC)
- [Information for Vermont's businesses](#) (ACCD)
- [Information for Vermont's schools](#) (AOE)
- [Mental Health Support](#)