

Independent SAGE Making a Plan for Household Mixing December 2021

Introduction

Omicron is extremely transmissible. If anyone in a moderately-sized social gathering indoors (e.g., ten people meeting up in a house for Christmas dinner) has Omicron, most people are likely to become infected, regardless of vaccine status. Omicron also has a wider range of symptoms. It is therefore vital to stay at home if you have symptoms typical of a cold; stay away from anyone who has cold symptoms; take a Lateral Flow Test **immediately** before mixing, and to ensure all indoor spaces where people are mixing are as well ventilated as possible.

The Planning Template is designed to help people make decisions about whether to defer meeting with friends and family over the coming high-risk winter holiday season. If you decide to meet up, it suggests how best to do this in order to minimise risk to everybody involved.

The Planning Template has been updated from one published by SAGE a year ago¹.

1. What is a Household Mixing Plan?

It is a plan that will enable you to meet up with friends and family for social interactions while keeping your risk of infecting each other with COVID-19 as low as possible.

2. Who should make a Household Mixing Plan?

Everyone who is planning for a social interaction with people from other households.

3. What should the Plan cover?

- Who will you meet and how many people will come together?
- How often?
- In what setting?
- For how long each time?

The Plan should also cover what you will do on each of these occasions to minimise the risk of infecting each other. This involves:

- a. Ensuring enough ventilation by opening windows and doors
- b. Maximising space between people in indoor venues and spaces
- c. Using face masks and of FFP2 grade if possible
- d. Doing a Lateral Flow Test *immediately* prior to meeting
- e. Making sure hands, objects and surfaces are regularly cleaned
- f. Planning your activities so that you limit those which have a higher risk of spreading the virus

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emgspi-b-mitigating-risks-of-sars-cov-2-transmission-associated-with-household-social-interactions-26-november-2020>

How to make the Plan

Step 1:	Arrange a discussion with the people who you are thinking about meeting to prepare the plan.
Step 2:	Between you, make a list of the people you would like to meet up with. For each of these decide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How vulnerable to more severe COVID-19 disease you think they are because of age, health problems, or vaccination status 2. Their need for emotional support and contact.
Step 3:	From that list, decide who has top priority, balancing their vulnerability and need.
Step 4:	Discuss with those you decide to meet – by phone, online, or outdoors – what their wishes are in terms of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whether and when to meet 2. In what setting 3. For what length of time.
	Use this discussion to create a timetable. Online is safer than outdoors, which is, in turn, safer than well-ventilated indoors, which is safer than unventilated indoors. When it comes to setting, always start with the safest options and only move to less safe ones if needed. If meeting indoors, agree a time limit or break the time up with some outdoor activity allowing a refresh of the air in the space. When people are coming together from two or more households, consider whether it is easier to maintain ventilation and space per person in some houses than others – do not just stick to a tradition (e.g., “we always go to X’s house” or “it’s Y’s turn”). When it comes to mixing, take special care to protect those most vulnerable to serious illness should they be infected. This may mean taking the decision to meet online or by telephone.
Step 5:	Discuss the activities that you will do and how you can adjust them to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. For example, playing games that involve physical contact, singing, or aerobic activities indoors are all activities associated with transmission. Consider whether you can replace these with lower risk alternatives or carry out some activities outdoors.
Step 6:	Make a record of your decisions and check that everyone involved is happy with the plan.
Step 7:	Make sure everyone does everything possible in the days before the visit to avoid getting infected, such as self-isolating or minimising contact with others, wearing face masks in indoor public areas, and not going to other gatherings.
Step 8:	Make sure you are prepared for each visit in terms of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How you will maximise the ventilation while keeping everyone comfortable. Ask everyone to wear extra layers indoors. 2. Having Lateral Flow Tests available to take before meeting up and for anyone who has forgotten to take one so that they can do one there and then and wait for results before socialising 3. How you will ensure maximum space per person 4. Cleaning surfaces and objects beforehand and at regular intervals and making sure hand sanitiser is always to hand for yourself and guests
Step 9:	Make sure everyone in the planned gathering is familiar with the arrangements, paying special attention to people who might have difficulty understanding or adhering to the agreed arrangements.
Step 10:	Immediately before the visit, check with everyone that they do not have any of the symptoms (including fever, tiredness, dry cough, runny nose, headache, and sore throat); have not knowingly been in contact with anyone with symptoms, and that they will do a Lateral Flow Test immediately before coming to the gathering.