



Family is everything, let's reduce the risk at home and protect our elders

In El Paso, family is everything. Many El Pasoans have been doing everything they can to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to their family, friends and neighbors by social distancing, wearing masks when out in public or simply by staying home.

But we should also be mindful of reducing the risk within the very place we may feel the most safe – our own homes. The average household in El Paso County includes more people than the average household nationally. Living with our extended families – our parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles – is one of the many things that makes our community unique. We put family first.

But, the age and/or health conditions of some of our household family members put them at a higher risk of complications, including death, due to COVID-19, so we have to practice effective ways to reduce the risk in our own homes.

So, what can we do?

“First and foremost, don’t bring the virus home with you,” says Dr. Kristina Mena, Dean of the University of Texas - Houston School of Public Health, El Paso Campus. “Many El Pasoans work in essential jobs or run essential errands for the household. If you do leave the house, for any reason, limit contact with household members.”

It may not be easy, or seem natural, but wearing masks at home can help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to family members.

Dr. Mena also offers the following tips:

- Always remember to immediately change clothes and wash your hands when returning home. This reduces the risk of contaminating furniture or other high touch areas of the house.
- To help social distance at home, consider making some changes to how furniture is arranged in order to create at least six feet of distance between chairs and sofas. Increase ventilation by opening windows or doors as much as possible.
- Masks have been shown to greatly reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 by reducing the number of particles and droplets which come from our mouths when we breath, talk, sneeze or cough. Consider wearing masks, even at home and especially if you live with elderly family members.

REDUCE THE RISK
REDUCE EL RIESGO



“One of the qualities we all love about El Paso is our respect for our culture, our heritage and our elders,” says Emma Schwartz, president of the Medical Center of the Americas (MCA) Foundation. “That’s why so many of us return home or invite our elderly loved ones to live with us. Though wearing masks at home may seem extreme, we should respect the fact that our elders’ age puts them at a higher risk for COVID-19.”

Another factor that makes El Paso unique to other parts of the country is that we are all one big extended family. We love inviting our extended family over to our homes to enjoy a cookout and the big game, and we welcome their friends – and sometimes their friends’ friends – too.

But right now, with El Paso’s COVID-19 numbers still shockingly high, inviting those uncles, aunts, cousins and others into our homes is making them less safe – for our elders and for ourselves.

Last but not least, while we are all trying to refrain from going out in public unless it’s essential, one thing we should not be putting off is medical care. Keeping your household healthy means seeing a doctor if you feel sick. Don’t put healthcare on hold because of COVID-19. It’s important to keep up with doctor’s and dental visits, preventative care and immunizations. It’s also important to get tested often if you must leave your home for work or other essential duties, or at the first sign of symptoms such as cough, congestion, loss of sense of taste or smell, headaches or other signs of COVID-19.

We’ve all been asked to sacrifice a lot this year, but by making these sacrifices now, we can win the fight against COVID-19. Together. For you, for me and for our elders.

Visit <https://www.reducetherisk915.org> for more ways to help reduce the risk this holiday season and for other ways to navigate COVID-19 and other challenges during this unprecedented time.