

PRINT-Rating the Risk of Summer Activities

Illinois has now passed 6,000 deaths related to COVID-19 and there have been nearly that many in Michigan.

Even though some businesses are reopening, many attractions that would draw crowds remain closed and with good reason, according to OSF HealthCare Infection and Prevention Control Director Lori Grooms. She said the risks are real for gathering anywhere where there are large numbers of people.

So what can/should you be doing right now? Grooms said returning for important medical care can be done safely because health care facilities have re-doubled infection prevention efforts through more frequent cleaning and sanitizing, setting up physical distance markers, installing plastic shields for check-in, requiring masking and screening for everyone, and reducing wait times by allowing patients to have virtual visits.

So what else *can* you do this summer? Grooms said it depends on knowing the risk and accountability of the people you choose to be around, the amount of space available, and how much time you plan to spend with them. Another epidemiologist from Ohio State University put it this way -- consider: "time, space, people, place."

Going to Church

The Illinois Department of Public Health is still calling for outdoor or remote services when possible, along with cleaning protocols. Each Catholic diocese in Illinois will issue protocols corresponding to the phase that their various regions are experiencing. Regions within a diocese may vary from place to place as determined by rates of infection. There may be adjustments in the protocols as the situation evolves.

In Michigan, State health officials continue to recommend all churches refrain from in-person gatherings and use of church buildings but religious houses of worship are exempt from being penalized if they violate Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's ban on gathering of more than 50 people.

Grooms, who helped the Peoria Catholic Diocese come up with [general principles and specific guidelines](#), said there is still a moderate-to-high risk for attending *indoor* services, especially for elderly and those with chronic conditions.

"One of the recommendations has been that if you have worship services that you remove the singing. You can still have musical worship, but you just don't have individuals singing. In one study there was an outbreak related to a choir practice," she pointed out.

She said singing spreads droplets which could contain the novel coronavirus. Another risk relates to the amount of time spent together which is typically one to two hours for most religious services and the gatherings include people from different families with unknown risk and accountability levels.

Eating Outside at Restaurants

Grooms said this could be considered low risk as long as there is six feet physical distance between tables and individuals dine with their own family. The risk increases when you are with friends and others whose risks and exposure are unknown.

She suggested knowing in advance what the restaurant is doing to reduce spread of COVID-19. Grooms said you should pay attention to details.

"When your hamburger comes, do you have your own packet or do you have your own cup of ketchup or mustard to put on the hamburger. That decreases the risk as well. Is your server wearing a mask?" Grooms said you should make sure that's the case and restaurants should be doing temperature checks when employees start their shift. Grooms also recommends restaurants have separate entrances and exits and that they eliminate open self-serve areas or buffets.

Hosting a Backyard Barbeque

Meeting in a spacious outdoor area with only a small group isn't too risky; a low-to-medium risk depending on the attendees and what their behaviors have been. Grooms said you should also consider whether your guests will should be masking when they are not eating especially if you or others are at risk and whether you have enough space to maintain the six-foot physical distancing requirement. Another way to even further reduce the risk is to make it a Bring-Your-Own-Everything. Backyard barbeques typically means a food table that everyone congregates around and shared serving utensils, having it be a Bring-Your-Own, removes that risk.

"The fact that I am having a backyard barbeque and I've got 10 hamburgers on a plate and everybody has to come get the hamburger, that means 10 people have come up to that area and touched either the plate or the utensils to get the hamburger onto their own plate," she observed.

Outdoor Swimming

Swimming outdoors could be lower risk if you are using your own backyard pool with your own family and a couple of friends who have had limited exposure to anyone and no underlying conditions. The risk increases at a public pool or beach where it can be difficult to keep a six-foot distance and not touch surfaces where others have come in contact.

Grooms said it's also more difficult to keep children apart in those settings.

"It's very hard to get children to not want to play with other children so that increases the risk there because you're socializing them with people who might be outside your normal family circle," she highlighted.

Hiking and Bicycle Riding-

Biking and Hiking risk would be relevant to the number of people you encounter and the ability to maintain distance. If you are going on a busy trail and your hike is at a leisurely pace a mask might be in order, but you should consider your ease of breathing and the level of activity against the risk of people you might encounter according to Grooms.

If you are hiking or biking for competition or workout you may want to consider choosing lower traffic trails or times when fewer persons would be out. Also, Grooms recommended considering if it's an activity where people from multiple communities are coming together such as a National or State Park trail or your own community trail used by local residents where you know the prevalence of the virus.

Camping is another low-risk summer activity when limited to the family and use of your own tent, camper or RV. In fact, for that reason, RV dealers and outdoor stores are reporting brisk sales.

Please check the [Illinois](#) or [Michigan](#) Departments of Public Health for safety guidelines to engage in additional activities that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.