



Mott Poll Report

November 23, 2020
Volume 37
Issue 3

Considering Children in COVID-19 Thanksgiving Plans

Thanksgiving is a chance for many children to interact with grandparents and other extended family members. However, the COVID-19 pandemic may impact families' ability or willingness to gather in one place. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 0-12 years about their plans for Thanksgiving gatherings with their extended family.

Nearly all parents (94%) report their children get together with extended family members for different occasions. Half (51%) say that COVID-19 has caused a substantial decrease in the time their children spend with extended family members, while 23% report a slight decrease in time with extended family.

Three-quarters of parents (76%) say children usually see their extended family on Thanksgiving. Most of these Thanksgiving gatherings (88%) include grandparents or other older adults, and 40% involve persons traveling out of state.

Among parents whose children usually see extended family on Thanksgiving, only 61% plan to gather in-person with extended family for Thanksgiving 2020, and only 18% plan to involve persons traveling from out of state.

Some parents describe competing and overlapping priorities for Thanksgiving 2020, with over half indicating it is very important that their child sees extended family (53%) and shares in family holiday traditions (58%), and three-quarters say it is very important to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at a family gathering (78%). Only one-third of parents (35%) feel that overall, the benefits of gathering with family at Thanksgiving are worth the risk of spreading or getting COVID-19.

Parents plan to use different strategies to keep children and guests safe at Thanksgiving. Most parents say they will ask family members to not attend a Thanksgiving gathering if they have any COVID-19 symptoms or exposure (88%). Two-thirds (64%) will not invite certain family members who have not been practicing COVID-19 precautions. Three-quarters (76%) will try to limit contact between their child and high-risk guests such as seniors or people with medical conditions. Two-thirds (68%) plan to ask guests to maintain social distancing as much as possible.

Preventing COVID-19 at Thanksgiving

Percent of parents who will do the following

Exclude family with COVID-19 exposure or symptoms

88%

Limit contact between children and high-risk guests

76%

Ask guests to social distance

68%

Exclude family who do not use COVID-19 precautions

64%

Report Highlights

1 in 2 parents say COVID-19 has substantially decreased the time children spend with extended family members.

Over half of parents say it is very important that their child sees extended family and shares in family holiday traditions.

1 in 3 parents feel the benefits of gathering with family for Thanksgiving are worth the risk of spreading or getting COVID-19.



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2020

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in August 2020 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,027). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,443 parents who had at least one child age 0-12 years. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 3 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Extended family – grandparents, cousins, and other relatives – help children connect with their own history and understand their place in the world. In many families, holidays are key occasions where extended family carry on traditions that have been passed down for generations. However, COVID-19 is a major impediment to family connections, with half of parents saying that it has substantially decreased the time children spend with extended family. As Thanksgiving approaches, this Mott Poll demonstrates that many families are struggling with whether and how to continue their holiday traditions.

In thinking about their Thanksgiving plans, parents appear to be balancing risks and benefits of having a traditional celebration. The major concern is the pandemic, as three-quarters of parents felt it is very important to prevent the spread of COVID-19; this is likely a priority because 9 in 10 parents reported that their Thanksgiving gatherings typically include grandparents or other older adults. Yet over half of parents indicated it was very important for their child to be with extended family and share in Thanksgiving traditions.

A key strategy to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission will be choosing carefully who to include in Thanksgiving celebrations. Nearly all parents plan to exclude family members who have been exposed to or are reporting symptoms of COVID-19; many also plan to exclude family members who have not been following recommended precautions, such as wearing masks, social distancing, and avoiding social gatherings. In assessing the likelihood of COVID-19 exposures, parents should be sure to ask whether cousins or other school-age family members are attending in-person classes and activities and, if so, the extent to which COVID-19 precautions are followed consistently. This may be uncomfortable for families to negotiate, especially if some family members are quarrelsome about this topic.

Most parents in this Mott Poll indicated that they will limit contact between children and grandparents and other high-risk adults. However, it may be difficult to maintain these types of precautions throughout a multi-day visit or even during a gathering that includes a lengthy dinner. Therefore, parents should think carefully about whether to gather in person with high-risk family members.

In this unique situation, children may be better served if parents are thoughtful about how to preserve family traditions without an in-person gathering. Parents may want to talk with children about their favorite Thanksgiving foods, decorations or activities, and then use that input to plan a virtual celebration that includes family members in different locations. If children mention a particular holiday decoration displayed by grandparents, parents can encourage them to create their own version at home. If children favor an aunt's pumpkin pie, parents can have children try their hand at making it, with age-appropriate assistance. Phone or video calls with grandparents and other family members can help them include them in the process. Parents may want to arrange a group call or virtual gathering at a specific time for extended family to share stories or to have a family member give a blessing before Thanksgiving dinner. The key for parents is to focus on elements of the celebration that represent family traditions or that seem most important to children.

In families that choose to celebrate with extended family or other guests, parents should talk with children in advance about how to celebrate safely, including a reminder about masks and social distancing, along with a request for "voice etiquette" by limiting singing or yelling, as these actions can more easily spread viruses. Parents also should plan for children to engage in outdoor activities for as much of the day as possible. With COVID-19 cases increasing in every state, it is essential that all family members do their part to prevent further spread.