

My Fellow Louisianans,

The holiday season is among us, but unfortunately, so is COVID-19. I know that it's hard to imagine Thanksgiving or Christmas without all of the traditions we hold dear. I come from a big family. Some of my most treasured memories were spent around the dinner table passing around turkey and pie. But it's the people around that table I treasure most of all, and that is why this holiday season is going to look different for my family.

Even if we have never met, your family means a lot to me as well. I have seen too many of our fellow Louisianans lose their lives because of this terrible disease. COVID is surging across the country to a degree that dwarfs the spring and summer surges. Test positivity, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are all increasing at alarming rates, both nationally and here in Louisiana. There has been a net increase of 200 hospitalizations in just the last week. That is a rate of increase that our hospitals cannot sustain. You have my promise that I will do everything within my power to keep our state safe, but it will take all of us to slow the spread. We've done it before, and we can do it again.

This does not mean we can't celebrate Thanksgiving or the holidays. I am not sure there has been a year where we have needed gratitude, love or one another more. COVID cannot take that away. That is why I am encouraging everybody to have a plan for keeping your family safe over the holidays.

This has been a tough year, and I know we desperately want to see one another, eat good food, laugh and give each other hugs. Nothing would be better. But when we gather with those outside of our everyday household, we create environments that are conducive to catching and spreading COVID, even if it is a small gathering. As the small wedding in rural Maine that resulted in more than 170 COVID cases and 7 deaths shows us, even small events can have big impact.

Have an honest conversation about who you might be putting at risk by gathering, and come up with creative ways to visit with them virtually or from a distance instead. Consider that 40-50% of individuals with COVID never show symptoms but they are contagious and spread the disease.

Remember that outside is safer than inside, and always wear your mask if you are around people not part of your immediate household, wash your hands frequently, stay home when you are sick, and go out of your way to protect the vulnerable. This year, showing our love for those we care about means making sacrifices that will keep them safe.

Finally, I want to thank everyone for their hard work and diligence this year, especially our frontline workers who have kept us going and our healthcare heroes who have put their own health at risk in order to deliver care. I know we are tired – not just from COVID but also from three devastating hurricanes. But we can't let our guard down. Now, more than ever, we must work together to keep our families and neighbors safe. If we continue to take the necessary precautions now, I am confident that we will be able to gather around the table together again.

John Bel Edwards
Governor