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Summer is here which typically means vacations, July 4th festivities and staying busy with family and friends. But summer 2020 is unlike any summer we have previously experienced, thanks to the Coronavirus. How should we modify our usual activities and which activities should we avoid?

What factors should I consider before making plans?

- Consider where an activity will take place. Outside is much safer than inside.
- How many other participants will be present? In the continuation of phase 2 in NC, gatherings are limited to 25 people outside and 10 people inside. The more people, the greater the possibility someone has the virus. Remember to maintain 6 feet of distance from others.
- How long will you be in contact with others? The longer amount of time you spend near others increases risk.
- How likely are the other participants to be following guidelines, such as wearing face coverings and practicing social distancing? Under the new NC executive order, masks are now required, so hopefully everyone will be wearing one, but the greater the number of folks you are exposed to who are not practicing preventative guidelines, the greater the risk to you.
- Most importantly, you need to consider your personal risk for developing serious complications if you were to become infected, such as age over 65 or the presence of underlying medical conditions. If any of these conditions exist, you should consider not participating.

What about on the water activities?

This is a big part of Pamlico County summertime fun and can be continued with few restrictions. You should limit the number of people on your boat to allow for social distancing. Keep in mind that speaking loudly to overcome the noise of boat motors sends forth more particles (and potentially more viral particles if someone is infected) than speaking at a normal volume. Keep social distancing in mind if you raft up with other boats, even though you are in a wide-open space. If you are not able to maintain 6 feet of distance on your boat with others outside your household or in a raft-up, you need to wear your mask.

It's a great summer for small boating, even if you go out with groups. There are many waterways in the county which are ideal for kayaks, canoes and paddleboards. If you don't own your own, several local businesses have these for rent. There are also smaller sailboats for one or two people, Lasers and C420's, which can be rented for a fun day on the water. If these boats are not familiar to you, this may be your summer to try new adventures.

How about summertime BBQ's?

What is summertime without a backyard BBQ with friends and relatives? As previously noted, outdoor is the key safe option here. The number of guests should be limited to recommended guidelines (25 outside), or lower depending on your space and comfort level. Consider only inviting guests you know have been limiting their activities (have not been going to multiple places or participating in larger crowds) and are following prevention guidelines (washing hands, wearing a mask).

Arrange tables and chairs to maintain social distancing of 6 feet between family groups. Have hand sanitizer available. Either make it a BYO-everything party or set up the food to avoid sharing of serving utensils. Multiple utensils can be provided or have designated servers. Cloth face coverings should be worn when people are close together, as when serving their plates. Provide touchless trash receptacles, so opening of containers by multiple hands is not needed,

Outdoor games, such as cornhole or croquet, would be safe. Games that require a greater number of people in teams, such as volleyball, are not as safe. Encourage frequent use of hand sanitizer. Wipe down the equipment with disinfectant when a new player will be using it.

Consider keeping a list of your guests just in case contact tracing becomes necessary because of a COVID-19 diagnosis in anyone at the gathering.

What about July 4th festivities?

In keeping with avoidance of large crowds, many usual July 4th activities will not take place this year, or you may not feel comfortable attending those that will occur. There are a number of activities with family, friends or in neighborhoods. Plan your own parade with decorated bicycles or golf carts or maybe even dinghies. Have a neighborhood yard decorating contest or a red/white/blue costume contest. Let your imagination rule July 4, 2020!

What about travel?

Road trips are safer than travel by airplane, train or bus. When traveling, you need to be aware of what COVID-19 restrictions are in place in the areas you will be traveling through or to. Take snacks and beverages with you to limit your stops. Be aware that not all typical bathroom stops may be available, as many gas stations have closed their bathrooms due to hygiene and safety concerns, so plan those stops early in case a search at other gas stations or retail stores becomes necessary. When using public restrooms, avoid retouching the faucet or door handles with your bare hands after washing them. Use paper towels for those purposes. Use a glove at the gas pump and dispose of it as soon as you have completed filling your tank.

Most hotels have become more vigilant in their cleaning and sanitizing processes, but you may want to confirm the hotel's procedures. Tripadvisor has launched Travel Safe, where you can review the safety precautions of hotels, restaurants and other venues. Wear your face covering when checking in and wash or sanitize your hands when the check-in process is completed. If staying in a hotel for more than one night, consider declining daily cleaning services to limit others from entering your room.

There are many more safe activities than listed here, so everyone should be able to find ways to be active, socialize and travel. Hopefully, this has given you some ideas on activities, as well as the additional precautions you need to take during this pandemic. The important points to remember are assessing your personal risk and doing your part in prevention of COVID-19, by maintaining a social distance of 6 feet, avoiding large crowds and washing your hands, and helping to reduce spread of COVID-19 by wearing a face covering.

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