



A message from Dr. Jonathan Rubens

Chief Medical Officer

December 2020



As I think back on 2020, it would be easy to focus on many of the negative headlines. However, I'd rather reflect on what we've accomplished this year. How we've demonstrated strength and courage in the face of adversity, shown our resilience and adaptability, and how we find joy and renewal in returning to the basics of family and community.

Approaching the holidays with gratitude

Your holiday celebrations, like mine, may look different this year. We're not traveling the way we once did, and we're reviewing state and local guidelines for event sizes. New and returning restrictions may be frustrating, but they're designed to promote health and safety. A core part of our holiday traditions is showing our loved ones they matter. Following state and local guidelines is one way to show our gratitude for our families, and friends, and just how important our communities are to us.

We've learned this year that physical distance doesn't equate to social distance. We are together, even if we're using technology to connect us. We've found ways to survive and thrive. As we stayed safe at home, we reconnected with people closest to us. I hope that some of the lessons of quarantine –appreciating simpler pleasures like time with family and exploring in nature – stay with us over time.

We've also had a clear reminder that our personal choices can have a very real effect on the lives and health of the most vulnerable in our communities. Weighing our health risks, and the health risks of our loved ones, is going to play a role in how we choose to celebrate. I'm looking forward to seeing all the new, creative ways we find to reach out to those around us this year.

Commit to a season of giving

The gift of health is something we're inclined to take for granted. As headlines from across the

country show, a new virus can come out of nowhere and become the single biggest health crisis of our lifetime. It's also drawn attention to the connection between physical and emotional health.

As the pandemic has grown, we've seen increased depression and anxiety, and it's undeniable that some segments of our population have been harder hit than others. It's critical that we give to ourselves the gift of nurturing all aspects of our well-being – physical, emotional, social, and societal.

Many of us found new hobbies that helped quiet our minds and soothed our anxieties. We developed coping strategies that will far outlast this pandemic. We learned that we have to find ways to maintain our health, that it's OK to share our worries with people around us, and that expressing compassion is a gift to ourselves as much as it is to the person receiving it.

When our personal health and well-being has a solid foundation, we can reach beyond ourselves to help those around us. Giving of yourself to your community strengthens your social connections and contributes to a positive self-identity. There are many ways to volunteer safely, and I encourage you to explore some that might be right for you.

Coming together

As the weather has gotten colder and outdoor socializing is less palatable, the idea of creating a "pandemic pod" or "bubble" has been gaining

popularity. People form a close-knit group and follow strict guidelines about wearing masks and social distancing when not with people from the group. The theory is that being conscientious when apart makes it possible to be safer when they're together.

If this is something that appeals to you, it may be a way to reinforce your social connections through the winter. However, you need to choose the people in your pod carefully.

- All participants need to agree to follow the rules. You do, and you need to be able to trust that the other participants will.
- If you're not comfortable having a direct conversation with someone about your expectations and theirs, then they may not be a good candidate for your pod.
- Even your close family may not be the right choice for your pod if you have different comfort levels with potential exposure to (and spreading of) germs.

When you participate in a pod, you can help protect yourself, those you love and your friends and neighbors. Following the rules you establish for it isn't a sacrifice, it's a demonstration that you accept responsibility for how your choices affect those around you.

Live in the present, plan for the future

There is good news. Recent reports indicate a safe, effective vaccine for COVID-19 may be imminent.* We're all invested in the idea that a viable vaccine, coupled with standardized treatment protocols, will reduce the anxiety around possible infections. The coming months should tell us more about how the vaccine will become available and when each of us is likely to have the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Another way to plan for a healthy future is to make sure that you and your loved ones have gotten your

flu vaccine. It doesn't protect against COVID-19, but it can help guard against the seasonal flu. Every year, the flu drives thousands of people into the health care system. This year, that system is already taxed by exploding infection rates in many parts of our country. Continuing to maintain social distance, regular hand washing and wearing masks can help reduce transmission rates of both the coronavirus and the flu.

A final note

My heart goes out to all the families who have been touched by the unprecedented stressors of this year – physical, emotional, financial, social and political. There's no doubt that this has been a year many of us will be happy to leave behind. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of the ActiveHealth team. We come to work every day committed to helping the people we serve live their healthiest lives.



From our team to yours, I wish you good health this holiday season.

Jonathan S. Rubens, MD, MHPE, CHIE

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 8 Things to Know About Vaccine Planning. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/8-things.html> Accessed November 17, 2020.