

## Christmas During COVID

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 Pandemic has had a global impact on everyone's life. In addition to the health and economic losses, the disruption to our daily routines and the things we take for granted can be difficult. The sense that we have no answers and no control can be particularly frustrating. However, we do know that the Holiday Season will need to be different this year and we can control (at least a little bit) how much we let the changes affect our holiday spirit.

### Planning A Santa Visit

With the traditional cold and flu season during the holidays, combined with a 'senior' Santa and extended family and friends traveling for visits, there is very little doubt that a visit from Santa this season will need to include steps to keep everyone as safe as possible. At the same time, I think it is important that we not allow the inconvenience of a few simple precautions dampen the spirit of joy that is the heart of the Christmas Season. Below are a few ideas that can make an in person Santa visit easier to manage during a 'Very COVID Christmas'.

- **(Smaller Groups...Shorter Visit)** Particularly for in-home visits, having fewer people will allow more room and a shorter, controlled visit. If Santa is to be a part of a larger and longer holiday party, consider scheduling Santa to stop in for a short story and visit at a specified time. A surprise pop-in that traditionally finds Santa surrounded by dozens of excited children at the door will probably not work this year.
- **(Create a Santa Zone)** Moving the Santa portion of the event outside to a covered porch, carport, patio, or open garage **is preferred and strongly encouraged**. A chair for Santa with a bench 6 feet in front or similar designated space on the floor will allow room for safe visits. Children can then turn around to face the camera for individual and small group photos without the need for climbing up on Santa's lap. Creating a defined space will also help control traffic flow and prevent crowding.
- **(Embrace the Mask)** Sometimes, the most memorable photos of children with Santa are those when an infant is crying or a toddler is making a very 'Grinchy' face. A true record of the way things were in times of Christmas Past can be better than a staged photo. With that in mind, provide fun masks for the kids and encourage your guests to bring a festive holiday mask to wear during their visit with Santa.
- **(Santa's Helper for Larger Gatherings)** If you are considering a larger gathering or drop-in for a commercial visit, restaurant, HOA, or even a large family gathering...it might be best to appoint a 'Santa's Helper' who can assist with social distancing, traffic flow inside the event, entrances and exits, and other precautions that might be in place. If necessary, contact Santa to see if he has a helper available to be booked for your event.
- **(Children are Believers)** Reindeer can fly, elves make toys, and Santa can deliver to all of the houses in one night! Children want to believe and a simple face mask or Santa shield is not going to change that. Preparing the kids in advance for these changes helps keep the Santa magic alive for another year.

### COVID-19 Safety Precautions for 2020 Santa Visits

All Santa bookings will be made with the understanding that **at a minimum**, any government mandates or health advisories in place at the time of the visit will be followed. A separate **outdoor** 'Santa Zone' is **STRONGLY** encouraged. "Santa" will wear a clear face shield or a mask at all times inside a crowded venue or any time the current six-foot 'social distancing' standard is not practical. All guests over the age of two years who are closer than six feet to "Santa" must wear a mask or shield while visiting or posing for photos. All visits with Santa will be no contact.