

Why Shrinking Your Social Bubble May Be Necessary Right Now

If you're one of the many people who've joined a social bubble or pod during the pandemic, you may want to reconsider the number of people you're interacting with as new surges occur. Getty Images

- Social bubbles or pods are a great way to stay within the CDC guidelines of physical distancing.
- The spread of COVID-19 may require cutting back on the number of people in your social pod.
- Having honest conversations with those in your social pod is the best way to keep everyone safe.

All data and statistics are based on publicly available data at the time of publication. Some information may be out of date. Visit our [coronavirus hub](#) and follow our [live updates page](#) for the most recent information on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, some people have created social bubbles or social pods — small groups of people with whom they physically interact — in order to get the comfort and socialization they need to get through the pandemic.

Experts say entering into a social pod isn't something that should be done lightly, though, and every person should evaluate the risks before joining.

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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states that the more people you interact with at a gathering and the longer you are together, the higher the potential risk of getting COVID-19.

However, many experts agree that maintaining a small circle of others you interact with in person can be beneficial to your well-being.

“Generally speaking, I think it’s certainly a good time to be mindful about who you are hanging out with, your current health status, and theirs. But that doesn’t mean we have to all self-isolate for perpetuity,” Dr. Michael Devine, dual-board certified internist and geriatrician and co-founder of Devine Concierge Medicine, told [name removed].

He added, “Social isolation for a prolonged period of time isn’t without its own risks. With no end to the pandemic in sight, it is important to learn how to live with COVID-19, rather than waiting for it to be over.”

Nevertheless, making adjustments — or shrinking — your social bubble may be necessary at different times during the pandemic to further minimize the risk to you and those in your group.

Why you may want to consider pruning your social pod right now

As some schools hold in-person learning, more people begin to go back to onsite work, and others expand their social activities, it's possible another surge of the virus could soon occur in your area.

The CDC COVID Data Tracker

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and state and local health departments

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provide updates on cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, as well as guidelines for decreasing the spread of COVID-19. Follow these for guidance on physical distancing.

Devine said that as new spikes in cases occur, "it may be best to social distance for a period of time." Then as infection rates begin to recede, "social gatherings, beginning small, can again start to be reintroduced."

If a large increase in the number of cases occurs in your area and shrinking your social bubble becomes necessary, the following three things can help make the process go more smoothly.

1. Cut out those you don't have to see

Start by cutting physical contact with those you do not live in the same household with and with people who you are not responsible for.

“My recommended approach would be to start by limiting direct/physical interaction with those who you rarely see anyway, followed by people who are at increased risk of exposure (e.g., less abidance to social distancing, does not utilize face coverings when in public, partakes in high-social gatherings, travels frequently, etc.), and high risk if infection is acquired (e.g., pregnancy, immunocompromised, elderly, etc.),” said Devine.

2. Be honest about why you're 'pruning' your pod

To avoid hurting people's feelings, have an honest conversation with family and friends about why you are limiting physical interactions and cutting back on your social bubble.

“This decreases the risk of miscommunication and people taking choices regarding safety personally. I recommend to keep communication honest and open and stress that it isn't personal. Convey that you want to protect them and yourself, and that you still love and care for them,” said Dr. Leela

R. Magavi, psychiatrist and regional medical director at Community Psychiatry.

However, she points out physical distancing shouldn't change the way you love and care for family and friends.

She recommends keeping other lines of communication open, and setting up a regular standing virtual catch up, so it doesn't feel like you are completely disconnected from those you were seeing on a regular basis.

Devine agrees that technology offers the opportunity to stay connected with friends and loved ones despite not being able to physically see each other.

"Social distancing doesn't mean you can't communicate with loved ones. Pick up the phone, try a video chat, send a text message or email. Although you are temporarily physically separated, you can absolutely still talk and let loved ones know that you are thinking of them. This goes a long way, and can make the process of physical isolation a whole lot easier to tolerate," he said.

3. Practice self-care

After you've considered the feelings of others in your pod, consider how adjusting your social bubble affects yours. Focusing on activities and self-care acts you enjoy can help your mental health.

“Individuals can engage in new hobbies, catch up on shows they have been meaning to watch for years, or read that exciting novel, which has been hibernating on the bookshelf... Daily walks and safe hikes to get that much needed fresh air also proves to be beneficial,” said Magavi.

Devine agrees.

“Keeping yourself active via exercise (independently and preferably indoors, at home), partaking in a hobby, or reading/learning something new can also keep you physically and cognitively engaged, easing the stress of social distancing,” he said.

Maintaining safety within your social pod

To keep your physical social bubble as safe as possible, the CDC offers guidelines

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for protecting yourself and others from COVID-19, including:

- Limiting exposure
- Washing hands frequently
- Staying 6 feet apart from others

- Wearing a mask when in public
- Covering coughs and sneezes
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces
- Monitoring your health daily

“Most importantly, we all need to be acutely aware of our own health status. Have you had a fever recently? Are you feeling unexplainably fatigued? Do you have a cough? Are you pregnant or immunocompromised in some way? Answering ‘yes’ to any of these questions may indicate that it is safer to forego social activity,” said Devine.

He suggests making it routine to check your temperature daily, and discussing health status with those in your social pod prior to getting together.

“If someone has a fever, it doesn’t necessarily mean they have COVID-19, but it would be safer for everyone to postpone the meet-up until you know for sure,” Devine said.

Additionally, consider the circumstances of the activity you plan to engage in with your social pod. Social gatherings that are limited in size, take place outdoors, and involve everyone wearing protective face-coverings are safest.

“Not all of these factors can be achieved in every social situation, but the more of them you can incorporate, the safer everyone will be,” Devine said.