

## ***COVID-19 means Thanksgiving alone for many Americans***

*Alan Gomez - USA TODAY*

*For Jennifer Broderick, the decision to spend Thanksgiving alone was a surprisingly simple one.*

*Her mother is a cardiology nurse, her sister works at a nursing home and Broderick has been teaching in-person classes as an assistant biology professor at Thiel College in Greenville, Pennsylvania. Since all of them interact with people outside of their immediate families each day, exposing them to [COVID-19](#), Broderick said she will stay home.*

*She may cook a turkey ["alongside" her family via Zoom](#), or she's thinking about making an unconventional meal on [this unconventional holiday](#): tacos.*

*"Because I care about my family and friends, this is a thing I can do to protect them," said Broderick, 29.*

*"If we could do a good job quarantining now, that could contribute to getting numbers lower so I can at least think about (seeing them during) Christmas."*

*The coronavirus pandemic is spreading out of control with [more than 250,000 Americans dead](#), schools [closing around the country](#) and the nation setting [a new record of infections](#) multiple times over the past week. That has prompted people to rethink their Thanksgiving plans, with many choosing to eat a meal known for community and family alone.*



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [is urging Americans](#) to keep Thursday's dinner small — ideally with only people already living in their household — and to [avoid traveling for the holiday](#). A bipartisan group of governors and mayors are urging people to follow that advice, arguing that it's more important to stay safe now and wait for the [multiple vaccines in production](#) to be finalized.

Those recommendations have made this holiday season a complicated one as families negotiate over social distancing ground-rules, how to share meals and whether the whole thing should be called off. Roughly one-third of Americans live in single-person households, according to Census data.

Taylor Edwards, 28, a digital marketing coordinator in Chicago who is still unsure whether she'll be eating alone on Thursday. Her parents are divorced and live in different neighborhoods of the city. Edwards has mostly stayed home and kept away from her parents to abide by the guidelines, but that's a difficult decision on such a time-honored holiday.

Each day that passes makes that decision even harder as COVID-19 cases spread in her Midwestern state, where Gov. J. B. Pritzker ordered a new round of restrictions starting Friday after the state's average daily COVID-19 deaths shot up from 37 a day in October to 84 a day so far in November, according to [data from The COVID Tracking Project](#).

*For now, Edwards is planning on briefly visiting her parents, but has a backup plan in place: she'll stay home, cook herself a Raman pasta dish she found online and open a bottle of red wine.*

*The lack of turkey, she says, is intentional.*

*"I'm trying to take the emotional ties off of this period of time," she said.*

*"I'm definitely not set. I just know so many people still moving ahead with Thanksgiving with 10 or 12 people, and I'm like, 'God, you have kids from college campuses coming in, you have elderly family members.'"*

*"This time next year we could be in a much better place, and I want all my family members to be there."*



*In Asheville, North Carolina, Lindsay Ann Spurgeon will be separated this Thanksgiving from another kind of family: her Alcoholics Anonymous group.*

*The 41-year-old has been sober for a little over a year, but the pandemic has made that especially grueling since most AA meetings have been canceled. One of her groups tried hosting a meeting outside, but it was difficult with all the cars roaring past. They've done meetings via Zoom, but Spurgeon said that doesn't provide nearly the same kind of support as the in-person meetings.*

*The holiday season is one of the most dangerous for people in recovery, given all the social gatherings that encourage drinking, the cold weather driving people inside and*

*the emotions associated with the holidays. That's why her group held a day-long meeting last year on Thanksgiving. Spurgeon is saddened it can't happen again in 2020.*

*"Those meetings are life or death," Spurgeon said.*

*"For me, it's mainly the social aspect of it, to have that mutual reassurance that we're all OK, that we're all doing the right thing, that if I wanted to drink, I could call so and so or crash at somebody's house and drink coffee and talk through it together. But we really can't do that now."*



*For [many of the nation's elderly](#), there is no decision to be made — eating alone is simply a way of life in 2020.*

*Ellen Gottke, 72, is retired, widowed, sick and estranged from what remains of her family. She has closed herself off from her friends to protect herself from the coronavirus, spending all her days inside her mobile home in Lothian, Pennsylvania.*

*The all-encompassing quiet has been agonizing for Gottke. One of her first jobs was running the old-time telephone switchboards now seen only in classic movies. The*

*work was grueling, taking calls all day, plugging in different cords to connect people to different parts of the country.*

*But she loved the work for one simple reason: "I could talk to people."*

*And while Thanksgiving used to be a big event for her family, with Gottke cooking the turkey and ham each year, she's planning to spend this holiday alone with a Hormel microwave dinner of turkey and dressing.*

*"It's horrible. Just horrible," she said while fighting back the tears.*

*"And then I get so mad when I see people walking around without masks. It's hard."*



*About 27% of adults age 60 and older live alone, [according to the Pew Research Center](#). Mark Bucher has seen those numbers play out in recent days on his cell phone.*

*The co-owner of the Medium Rare restaurant group based in Washington, D.C., [put out an offer](#) to deliver a Thanksgiving meal to anyone over 70 quarantining alone. A similar effort over Mother's Day netted 225 requests. This time? He's already reached 1,000 meal requests.*

*"The original intent was to do something uplifting and give back and be thankful for everything we have," Bucher said.*

*"But frankly, what we've learned is that the elderly have been overlooked."*

*Bucher said his email inbox has been flooded with tragic stories of elderly people who are suffering alone. He's even gotten calls from the Washington, D.C., government offering packets of personal protective equipment to deliver with the meals and asking his drivers to report back on the condition of the elderly people they visit.*

*The volume of requests has made this Thanksgiving drive an all-consuming endeavor, working with DoorDash to find enough drivers, ordering enough food to deliver and talking with private donors who want to help.*

*Bucher had already set up an [online fundraiser](#) to help deliver meals throughout this pandemic, and he said those donations will be critical to help all the elderly people who have begged him for a warm meal.*

*"It's a burden, but for whatever weird reason, I see it as an obligation," Bucher said. "I feel like we have to make this happen."*

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