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**Tips for a Safe Thanksgiving During the Pandemic**

*Heart of Texas Healthcare System urges everyone to take steps to avoid the spread of the virus.*

BRADY, Texas (Nov. 9, 2020) – Thanksgiving is a time to enjoy time spent with family and give thanks for our many blessings. This year, the busy holiday season comes at a time when COVID-19 poses serious risks to the community. That is why the Heart of Texas Healthcare System is urging everyone to take caution as the holidays approach.

“It is critical that everyone practices the three W’s – wear a mask, wash your hands and watch your distance,” said Tim Jones, CEO at Heart of Texas Healthcare System. “The number of new cases of COVID-19 is high throughout Texas, which is why we need to take steps to protect each other this holiday season.”

According to Texas Health and Human Services, more than 900,000 people across the state have been infected by COVID-19, which has led to the deaths of more than 18,000 Texans. Jones said that hospitals have seen an increase in patients in recent weeks and expect that to continue through the holidays, meaning that the number of patients could stress healthcare systems across the state. That is why taking steps to protect the community is so important.

**Keep your Thanksgiving circle small**

Many families will be spending time together during Thanksgiving. Jones said that limiting gatherings to small groups of family members from your household is an important way to avoid spreading COVID-19.

“Everyone is urged to avoid large group gatherings to avoid the spread of the dangerous disease,” LNAME said. “Instead, keep your family gatherings small – or consider hosting a virtual gathering with friends and loved ones over online platforms.”

**Carefully consider your travel plans**

Thanksgiving weekend is one of the year’s busiest times for travel. Many will be traveling by car or flying to visit family in other parts of the country. Experts have warned that airports could be busy and airplanes could be full during the busy travel period.

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Avoiding flying during this busy period is a good way to reduce your risk, but if you do need to fly, it is always important to wear your mask when you are unable to maintain at least six feet from another person, practice social distancing as much as possible and wash your hands frequently.

**Take steps to manage your stress**

The holiday season is notorious for adding burden to schedules. From the rush to get things done at work to travel obligations and preparing for company, stress can significantly impact a person’s body, mood and behavior.

This year, many people are feeling stressed due to the pandemic. It is a good idea to take a break from the news and focus on family.

Identifying stresses in your life is the first step. While at work, it can be helpful to save the easier tasks for the end of the day to allow yourself to relax before heading home. It is also important to make time for yourself each day by taking breaks for meals.

Exercise is also a great way to relieve stress. Stretching, short walks and other forms of physical activity can be extremely therapeutic and can promote your physical and mental well-being.

**Get a flu shot**

Although there is not yet a vaccine for COVID-19, the annual flu shot is available. The flu and COVID-19 will be circulating at the same time, making for an especially dangerous flu season.

Vaccines have been updated this season to better match circulating viruses and improve their overall effectiveness in protecting individuals from the viruses that research suggests will be the most common.

For McCulloch County families, Brady Medical Clinic is a convenient choice for flu shots and other primary healthcare services.

“Although this is a difficult year, it is important to remember that this will pass,” Jones said. “If we take steps to protect each other this year, we can ensure many happy holidays ahead.”

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If a medical emergency occurs, rest assured that help is around the corner. Heart of Texas Healthcare System and its trusted medical professionals can quickly provide healthcare when you need it most.

To learn more about local healthcare services and providers, please call Heart of Texas Healthcare System at 325-792-3525, or visit www.heartoftexashealthcare.com.

**About Heart of Texas Healthcare System**Heart of Texas Healthcare System provides healthcare for residents of McCulloch County and the surrounding area. Founded in 2011, the system offers a wealth of medical services, including 24-hour emergency care, advanced radiology services, a clinical laboratory, dialysis services, physical therapy, surgical services, patient education, sleep studies, and more. The system also owns and operates Brady Medical Clinic, which provides family medicine, preventive care, and acute care for minor emergencies. For additional information, please visit www.heartoftexashealthcare.org.

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