



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Celebrate safely this holiday season

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What images come to mind when you think of upcoming holiday celebrations? Sitting in front of a warm fire place? Spending time with friends and family? Eating too much?

Whether your ideal vision involves family gathered around a table feasting on delicious delicacies or good friends donning special holiday attire, parties that lack the proper planning inadvertently welcome a dangerous guest to the holiday festivities – risk.

“A great holiday party can turn tragic very quickly if something bad happens,” said Dr. Patricia LeDuc, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Human Factors Task Force director. “Fights, people being too drunk, injuries or a visit from the police can shut a party down in the blink of an eye and turn what could have been a great holiday memory into a very regrettable occasion.”

Mitigating risk when it comes to holiday parties means having a good plan and being a good host, according to officials at the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) organization. A responsible party host not only ensures all guests have a good time but also works diligently to keep friends and family safe.

A key party element that often puts a guest’s safety in jeopardy is alcohol.

Holiday parties give people more chances to use drugs and alcohol often resulting in an increase in drug- and alcohol-related tragedies around the holiday season. According to statistics released by MADD, at least 50 percent of all deadly car crashes that take place during the holiday season involve alcohol.

MADD officials offer several tips to help hosts plan a safe holiday party. Have low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks available and serve plenty of food like vegetables, cheese and dips so people are not drinking on an empty stomach. Plan activities like party games or door prize drawings to engage people and make for less active consumption of alcohol. Identify the non-drinking designated drivers in the group and offer them fun “mocktails.” Before the first guest arrives, develop a plan to deal with guests who drink too much and be prepared to take away keys, call and pay for taxis or welcome overnight guests.

While ensuring that overly intoxicated guests do not get behind the wheel of a car, hosts must also make sure these same guests are not attempting to walk home alone either. A significant proportion of pedestrians killed on American roads are under the influence of alcohol. Last year, the Army lost four Soldiers as the result of alcohol-related pedestrian accidents.

Walking after consuming alcohol or drugs (prescribed or illegal) is just as dangerous as driving, as alcohol affects your judgment, reflexes and coordination. Pedestrians under the influence of these substances have difficulty making safe decisions about crossing the road. Many intoxicated pedestrians involved in crashes with vehicles admit that they experienced difficulty judging the speed and distance of the approaching vehicle.

If you are drinking and plan to walk, take extra care, walk as a group and make sure there is at least one sober person in the group.

Although the success of a safe party is mostly the responsibility of the host, guests also have important responsibilities when it comes to safe celebrating. Before heading to a party or hitting the club, all parties should gather a group of friends and designate a driver. While at the party or club, alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, never leave a drink unattended or accept a drink from a stranger. Once the festivities are over, buckle up, make sure everyone else in the car is buckled and drive cautiously because there may be intoxicated drivers on the road, especially between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.

While the presence of alcohol at holiday parties can lead to some very unfortunate situations, the appearance of improperly prepared food can also result in a very unhappy experience for both guests and hosts.

Treat holiday food with respect. Preparing food takes a little planning, especially during the hectic holiday season. Before buying holiday treats, make room in your refrigerator. If you are combining food shopping with other holiday shopping, make the grocery store the last stop so food will not be left in the car while you are searching for the perfect gifts.

Also, don't forget holiday meals usually mean a lot of leftovers. Although you may not feel like doing much after a big meal, be sure to refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours of cooking the food. Separate leftovers into shallow containers. Turkey should be removed from the bone and stored separately from the stuffing and gravy. Use leftovers within four days, except stuffing and gravy which should be used within two days. If that seems impossible, freeze the leftovers.

The team at the Army Safety Center wants everyone to stay safe and have fun this holiday season. For more seasonal safety tips, visit <https://safety.army.mil> and click on the Fall/Winter Safety Campaign icon at the bottom of the page.

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