

What doctors want patients to know about physical distancing

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Physical distancing remains vital for limiting the spread of COVID-19. While physical distancing of at least six feet paired with [wearing face masks](#) and handwashing are everyday preventive actions that should be followed during the pandemic, patients are still uncertain about when these measures apply. Physicians want to clear up when to practice physical distancing and how.

Two AMA members took time to discuss how doctors can best encourage patients to practice proper physical distancing. They are:

- [Tyese Gaines, DO](#), an emergency medicine physician and a school physician for three charter schools in New Jersey.
- Christopher Garofalo, MD, a family physician in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

Drs. Gaines and Garofalo are also members of the [AMA Ambassador Program](#), which equips individuals with the skills and knowledge to confidently speak to the AMA's initiatives and the value of membership. The program also increases overall awareness about what the AMA does for physicians and their patients.

Here is what these physician experts had to say about physical distancing.

Always keep your distance inside

“We're in agreement about staying six feet away, but if for any reason you cannot be that far away, definitely have a mask on,” said Dr. Gaines. “We know that over 200,000 people have died from [COVID-19], so do you want to be a part of getting someone else sick? Do

you want to be responsible for that?”

“When you're inside, we're in close quarters and there are a lot of surfaces that can be touched,” said Dr. Gaines. “At some point someone's going to be too close and it's hard once someone gets up and moves or walks, now six feet becomes four feet. Should that person back up? There's too many moving parts when you're inside.”

Find out more [about Dr. Gaines](#), and learn more from the AMA about [eight coronavirus tips that doctors want patients to follow](#).

Distancing and the great outdoors

“One of the biggest things for people to understand is there really is a significant difference between being inside and outside,” said Dr. Garofalo. “That doesn't mean that you can't do anything inside at all and that you can do anything you want outside.”

“For example, if you are having your in-laws over and there will be four of you dining in the dining room, that will be magnitudes safer if you can do that outdoors,” he said.

However, “having it outdoors does not obviate the need to practice as much as you can the other main tenets, which are wearing a mask and being six feet apart,” said Dr. Garofalo. “You need the three things, and the more you maximize those three things, the better protected you are and the better protected everybody else is.”

Learn more about the [six things doctors want patients to know about masks](#).

Businesses must know space matters

When companies want to bring people back to the office, physical distancing must be kept top of mind. “Do we really need to have four people back-to-back in a cubicle?” said Dr. Garofalo. “The issue of public transportation is a whole other layer that does make a difference from a physical distancing standpoint.”

With many people “dependent upon that transportation to get to and from work, are you going to start bringing people back in?” he said. If companies need 70% of people to come back to the office, “it allows you to space things out more, so the people who do have to be there are allowed more safety.”

Learn more about [five ways to blunt COVID-19 pandemic's resurgence](#), outlined by Anthony S. Fauci, MD.

Far apart when home for holidays

“Given the fact that, in a lot of places now, cases are starting to spike again and we haven't even made it to the holidays—as heartbreaking as it is—I really don't know that we are ready yet for the large-scale gatherings,” said Dr. Gaines. “For Thanksgiving and Christmas, it depends on where you are. If you're going to have a hot-weather climate and you could do something outside, it may work the way we've been doing things this summer.

“But if you're in a cold-weather environment, you're going to be inside and it's really just a matter of how much space you have,” she added. “Can everybody spread out? Can you sit closest to the people who are already in your home?”

A smaller gathering of loved ones you share a household with followed by a virtual get-together with others is certainly the safest path to take, even though it's hard to decorate the Christmas tree over Zoom.

“The reality is we still have to do what we have to do to stay safe,” Dr. Gaines said, “because the longer we don't do those things, the longer we have to live in this very limited capacity—that's just the bottom line.”