

# **Interim Guidance: Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**

**March 3, 2020**

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will update this interim guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

This interim guidance is intended for organizers and staff responsible for planning mass gatherings or large community events in the United States. A mass gathering is a planned or spontaneous event with a large number of people in attendance that could strain the planning and response resources of the community hosting the event, such as concerts, festivals, conferences, worship services, and sporting events.

COVID-19 is an emerging respiratory disease and there is more to learn about its transmission, clinical course, and populations at increased risk of disease and complications (see How COVID-19 Spreads). Everyone can do their part to help plan, prepare, and respond to this emerging public health threat.

As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, CDC strongly encourages event organizers and staff to prepare for the possibility of outbreaks in their communities. Creating an emergency plan for mass gatherings and large community events can help protect you and the health of your event participants and local community.

CDC has developed recommended actions for preventing the spread of COVID-19 at mass gatherings and large community events. The Before, During, and After sections of this guidance offer suggested strategies to help you plan for and implement these recommendations.

## **Before a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in your community: Plan**

A COVID-19 outbreak could last for a long time. Depending on the severity of the outbreak, public health officials may recommend community actions designed to limit exposure to COVID-19. Officials may ask you to modify, postpone, or cancel large events for the safety and well-being of your event staff, participants, and the community. The details of your emergency operations plan should be based on the size and duration of your events, demographics of the participants, complexity of your event operations, and type of on-site services and activities your event may offer.

## ***Review the existing emergency operations plans for your venues***

**Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team at your venues.** Discuss the emergency operations plans and determine how they may impact aspects of your events, such as personnel, security, services and activities, functions, and resources. Work with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team to prepare for the key prevention strategies outlined in this guidance. Develop a contingency plan that addresses various scenarios described below which you may encounter during a COVID-19 outbreak.

**Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.** When forming key relationships for your events, include relevant partners such as the local public health department, community leaders, faith-based organizations, vendors, suppliers, hospitals, hotels, airlines, transportation companies, and law enforcement. Collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts. Clearly identify each partner's role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Contact your local public health department for a copy of their outbreak response and mitigation plan for your community. Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.

## ***Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan***

**Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions.** Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources such as your local public health department or CDC to encourage your event staff and participants to practice good personal health habits. Promote [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, which include:

- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.

**Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your events.** Plan to have extra supplies on hand for event staff and participants, including sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, tissues, and disposable facemasks (for persons who start having symptoms).

*Note: [Disposable facemasks](#) should be kept on-site and used only if someone (worker or attendee) becomes sick at your event. Those who become sick should be immediately isolated from staff and participants who are not sick and given a clean disposable facemask to wear. Facemasks may not be available for event organizers to purchase if the nationwide supply is low.*

**Plan for staff absences.** Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Event staff need to stay home when they are sick, or they may need to stay home to care for a sick household member or care for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing).

**Promote messages that discourage people who are sick from attending events.** This should include messages requesting that people leave events if they begin to have symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. They should seek medical advice promptly by calling ahead to a doctor's office or emergency room to get guidance. See CDC guidance on [what to do when sick with COVID-19](#).

**If possible, identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event.** Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately. Work with partners, such as local hospitals, to create a plan for treating staff and participants who do not live nearby. Include a plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations.

**Plan ways to limit in-person contact for staff supporting your events.** Several ways to do this include offering staff the option to telework if they can perform their job duties off-site, using email, and conducting meetings by phone or video conferencing. Reduce the number of staff needed such as staggering shifts for staff who support essential functions and services during events.

**Develop flexible refund policies for participants.** Create refund policies that permit participants the flexibility to stay home when they are sick, need to care for sick household members, or are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.

**Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel events.** Work closely with local public health officials to assess local capacities in the area. During a COVID-19 outbreak, resource limitations among local healthcare systems and/or law enforcement can influence the decision to postpone or cancel your events. If possible, plan alternative ways for participants to enjoy the events by television, radio, or online.

## ***Communicate about COVID-19***

**Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information.** Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, event staff, participants, suppliers, vendors, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information.

**Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants.** Information you share should be easily understood by everyone attending the events. Learn more about

reaching people of diverse languages and cultures by visiting: [Know Your Audience](#). You also can learn more about communicating to staff in a crisis at: [Crisis Communications Plan](#).

## **During a COVID-19 Outbreak: Act**

During an outbreak in your community, public health officials may provide event organizers with guidance intended to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Meet regularly with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team at the venue. They are positioned to accurately assess, manage, and communicate possible risks. Early action to slow the spread of COVID-19 will help keep event staff, participants, and the community healthy.

### ***Put your emergency operations and communication plans into action***

**Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Get [up-to-date information](#) about local COVID-19 activity from public health officials. Be aware of temporary school dismissals in your area because these may affect event staff.

*Note: Early in the outbreak, local public health officials may recommend [schools dismiss temporarily](#).*

**Communicate frequently with those in your communication chain.** Update key community partners and stakeholders regularly. Share information about how you and the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for the venues are responding to the outbreak.

**Distribute health messages about COVID-19 to event staff and participants.** Continue to promote everyday preventive actions. Offer resources to event staff and participants that provide reliable COVID-19 information. Address the potential fear and anxiety that may result from rumors or misinformation.

*Note: Use culturally appropriate messages, materials, and resources.*

**Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to event staff and participants.** Ensure that your events have supplies for event staff and participants, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks (if available), and cleaners and disinfectants. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with detergent and water prior to disinfection, especially surfaces that are visibly dirty.

- For disinfection, review this list of [products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#), maintained by the American Chemistry Council Center for Biocide Chemistries (CBC). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.

**Consider alternatives for event staff and participants who are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.** Currently, older adults and persons with underlying health conditions are considered to be at increased risk for severe illness and complications from COVID-19. Event organizers can consider reassigning duties for high-risk staff to have minimal

contact with other persons. People in high-risk groups should consult with their healthcare provider about attending large events. Consider providing refunds to event participants who are unable to attend because they are at high risk and/or provide information on alternative viewing options.

**Implement flexible staff attendance and sick-leave policies (if possible).** Require staff to stay home if they are sick or caring for a sick household member. Allow staff to work from home when possible. Notify staff when you plan to implement [COVID-19 leave policies](#). Provide instructions about how and when to safely return to work.

*Note: Consider asking staff who get sick with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) to avoid contact with others and to seek medical advice.*

**Separate those who become sick at your event from those who are well.** Establish procedures to help sick staff or participants leave the event as soon as possible. If any staff member or participant becomes sick at your event, separate them from others as soon as possible. Provide them with clean, [disposable facemasks](#) to wear, if available. Work with the local public health department and nearby hospitals to care for those who become sick. If needed, contact emergency services for those who need emergency care. Public transportation, shared rides, and taxis should be avoided for sick persons, and disposable facemasks should be worn by persons who are sick at all times when in a vehicle. Read more about [preventing the spread of COVID-19 if someone is sick](#).

*Note: Providing a sick staff member or event participant with a disposable facemask to wear does **not** replace the need for that person to leave as soon as possible, stay home, and seek medical advice. Wearing a disposable facemask in the workplace or while participating in a large event is not a sufficient infection control measure.*

### ***Determine the need to postpone or cancel your events***

**Put into action strategies for postponing or canceling your events.** Work closely with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues and with local public health officials to discuss the criteria you will use to postpone or cancel your event(s). Immediately alert event staff and participants if your event(s) has been postponed or canceled and inform them of your COVID-19 outbreak (or emergency) refund policy and re-ticketing options.

**Update everyone in your communication chain about when your events will occur if postponed or canceled.** Let event participants know whether new tickets can be obtained and when.

## **After a COVID-19 outbreak has ended in your community: Follow Up**

Remember, a COVID-19 outbreak could last for a long time. When public health officials determine that the outbreak has ended in your local community, work with them to

identify criteria for scaling back COVID-19 prevention actions at your events. Base the criteria on slowing of the outbreak in your local area. If your events were cancelled, work with your venues to reschedule your events.

***Evaluate the effectiveness your emergency operations and communication plans***

Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues to discuss and note lessons learned. Gather feedback from event staff, participants (if possible), community partners, and stakeholders to improve plans. Identify any gaps in the plans and any needs you may have for additional resources.

Maintain and expand your planning team. Look for ways to expand community partnerships. Identify agencies or partners needed to help you prepare for infectious disease outbreaks in the future and try to add them to your planning team.

Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.