

Interim Guidance: Mass Gatherings or Large Community Event Considerations, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

March 16, 2020

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed guidance 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. As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, the Virginia Department of Health 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. The full text of this guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>.

In consultation with local health officials, organizers of mass gatherings should consider the following intervention strategies based on COVID-19 severity status in Virginia. Broadly, VDH will assess and categorize COVID-19 severity using measures including the number of cases reported, case- hospitalization ratio and number of localities affected. Mass event planners should take into consideration their ability to implement modifications to their normal operations for moderate and high severity level situations depending on the size and scope of their event.

The guidance below is structured in three sections: **prior** to COVID-19 detection in your community, **once** COVID-19 is detected in your community, and **after** COVID-19 event in your community.



PRIOR to COVID-19 Detection in your community

- Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team at your venues.
- Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.
- Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information.
- Look for ways to expand community partnerships particularly partners needed to help you prepare for infectious disease outbreaks.
- Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.
- Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions.
- Plan ahead for staff absences.
- Plan to have extra supplies on hand to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Develop and promote messages that discourage people who are sick from attending events.
- If possible, identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event.
- Plan ways to limit in-person contact for staff supporting your events.
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants.
- Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel events.
- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants.



ONCE COVID-19 IS DETECTED in the community

Once COVID-19 is detected in a community, health department recommendations addressing any change in normal operations will depend on a number of factors such as the number of cases detected, the severity of illness associated with those cases and how widespread infection is or is predicted to be based on case histories. Assessing these and other factors will help the health department determine the severity of the situation, which will help inform recommendations. In consultation with local officials, large event and mass gathering organizers should consider implementing the following when COVID-19 is detected in their or neighboring communities. The activity levels below that inform suggested actions are based on the CDC document “Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission” found within the “Large Events/Mass Gatherings” section of the [VDH Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) page by choosing the menu option “Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities.”

Actions to take DURING the identification of NONE to MINIMAL travel-associated cases with NO EVIDENCE of COVID-19 COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

- Know where to find local information on COVID-19 and local trends of COVID-19 cases.
- Encourage staff and community members to [protect their personal health](#).
- Know the [signs and symptoms of COVID-19](#) and what to do if organization members/staff/attendees become symptomatic.
- Identify safe ways to serve those that are at high risk or vulnerable (outreach, assistance, etc.).
- Put into action strategies for postponing or canceling your events.
 - Cancel or postpone in-person events consisting of 100 people or more.
 - Events of any size should only be continued if they can be carried out with adherence to guidelines for protecting [vulnerable populations](#), [hand hygiene](#) and [social distancing](#) (which has been defined by CDC as maintain a distance of 6 feet away from others).
- Limit events and meetings that require close contact.
- Review, update, or develop emergency plans for the event, especially consideration for individuals at increased risk of severe illness.
- Encourage staff and attendees to stay home and notify organization administrators of illness when sick.
- Encourage personal protective measures among organization/members/attendees and staff (e.g., stay home when sick, handwashing, use good respiratory etiquette).
- Clean frequently touched surfaces at organization gathering points daily.
- Ensure hand hygiene supplies are readily available in the building.

Actions to take DURING the identification of MINIMAL TO MODERATE TRANSMISSION of COVID-19

- Continue to stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.
- Communicate frequently with those in your communication chain.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces at the event space daily.
- Put into action strategies for postponing or canceling your events.
 - Cancel or postpone in-person events consisting of 50 people or more.
 - Events of any size should only be continued if they can be carried out with adherence to guidelines for protecting [vulnerable populations](#), [hand hygiene](#) and [social distancing](#) (which has been defined by CDC as maintain a distance of 6 feet away from others).
- Distribute health messages about COVID-19 to event staff and attendees.
- Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to event staff and attendees.
- Consider alternatives for event staff and participants who are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.
 - Reduce activities that require close contact, especially for organizations with individuals at increased risk of severe illness.

- Consider offering video/audio of events.
- Implement flexible staff attendance and sick-leave policies (if possible).
- Separate those who become sick with COVID-19 symptoms at your event from those who are well and then contact local public health officials.
- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should not take public transportation or share rides.

- Update everyone in your communications chain about when your events will occur if postponed or canceled.

Actions to take DURING the identification of SUBSTANTIAL community transmission

- **Cancel events/mass gatherings of any size**



AFTER a COVID-19 event in your community

Once concern about COVID-19 has subsided, organizers of large events and mass gatherings are encouraged to work with local officials to help scale back prevention efforts specific to COVID-19. Recommendations to consider in this phase of response include:

- Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues to discuss and note lessons learned.
 - Maintain and expand your planning team.
 - Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.
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