

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

March 9, 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/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>.

In addition, while organizers of mass gatherings are encouraged to implement some measures articulated in this guidance as part of normal operations or when the likelihood of COVID-19 infection is low, some measures may be more appropriate if COVID-19 infections are reported in Virginia and, further, if infection becomes widespread throughout the Commonwealth.

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 (low to high severity)

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.

- Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.
- Communicate frequently with those in your communication chain.
- Distribute health messages about COVID-19 to event staff and participants.
- Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to event staff and participants.
- Consider alternatives for event staff and participants who are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.
- Implement flexible staff attendance and sick-leave policies (if possible).
- Separate those who become sick at your event from those who are well.
- Put into action strategies for postponing or canceling your events.
- Update everyone in your communication chain about when your events will occur if postponed or canceled.



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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