Indiana State
Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

COVID-19 Guidance for Mass Gatherings

WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus. It is not the same as other types of coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

HOW SHOULD WE PREPARE FOR A COVID-19 OUTBREAK?

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 plans and determine how they may impact aspects of your events, such as personnel, security, services and activities, functions and resources. Develop a contingency plan that addresses various scenarios you may encounter during a COVID-19 outbreak.
  - **Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.** When forming key relationships, include the local public health department, other community and faith leaders, local businesses, and educational institutions.
- **Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plans**
  - **Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions**
    - **Encourage respiratory etiquette** (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve).
    - **Encourage frequent, proper handwashing** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or with hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
    - **Perform routine environmental cleaning.** Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently-touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, countertops, work stations) with usual cleaning and disinfection products. Follow all instructions on the product label.
  - **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your organization.** Have supplies on hand for staff, volunteers, and those you serve, such as soap, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues,

trash baskets, and disposable facemasks. Plan to have extra supplies on hand during a COVID-19 outbreak.

- o **Plan for staff absences.** Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Staff (and volunteers) may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff members.
- o **Identify space that can be used to separate sick people (if possible).** Designate a space for people who may become sick while at work and cannot leave immediately. If possible, designate a nearby separate bathroom just for sick people. Develop a plan for cleaning the room daily.
- o **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 acute respiratory virus.
- o **Plan ways to limit in-person contact for staff supporting your events.**
- o **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.
- o **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. If possible, plan alternative ways for participants to enjoy the events by television, radio or online.

- **Communicate about COVID-19**
  - o **Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information.** Identify everyone in your chain of command and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of command.
  - o **Identify and address potential language, cultural and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants.** Information should be easily understood by everyone attending the events.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO IF COVID-19 SPREADS TO OUR COMMUNITY?

- **Put your emergency operations and communication plans into action.**
  - o **Stay informed with CDC's up-to-date information.**
  - o **Communicate with your community members if events are changed, postponed, or cancelled.**
  - o **Emphasize everyday preventive actions through intensified communications with employees and visitors to your organization.**
    - Stay home when sick.
    - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow.
    - Wash hands often.
    - Limit close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).
  - o **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to event staff and participants. This can include hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks and cleaners and disinfectants.**

- o **Consider alternatives for event staff and participants who are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.**
- o **Implement flexible staff attendance and sick-leave policies, if possible.**
- o **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.
- **Determine the need to postpone or cancel your events**
  - o **Put into action strategies for postponing or canceling your events.** Work closely with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues to discuss the criteria you will use to postpone or cancel your events.
  - o **Update everyone in your communication chain about when your events will occur if postponed or cancel.**

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WHEN A COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENDS IN OUR COMMUNITY?

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 of your emergency operations and communication plans**
  - o **Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues to discuss and note lessons learned.** Gather feedback. Identify any gaps in the plans and needs you may have for additional resources.
  - o **Maintain and expand your planning team.**
  - o **Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The ISDH call center for healthcare providers and members of the public who have concerns about COVID-19 is now staffed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at 317-233-7125. After-hours calls should be directed to 317-233-1325 and will be answered by an on-call epidemiologist.

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available at the links below.

- CDC COVID-19 guidance for mass gatherings or large community events: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html
- CDC COVID-19 recommendations for environmental cleaning and disinfection: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html
- CDC steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html
- ISDH guidance for home care: https://www.in.gov/isdh/files/IN_COVID-19_Home_Care_2.28.20.pdf
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: https://www.in.gov/isdh/28470.htm