Advice for organising public gatherings

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets found at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources.

COVID-19 and public gatherings

Everyone in the community must play a role if we are to help slow the spread of COVID-19. This includes people considering organising, attending or supporting attendance at a public gathering.

A public gathering is any function or event attended by a large group of people, such as conferences, music festivals, sporting events, some religious and life celebrations, cultural events, elections and other public occasions.

From 16 March 2020, the Australian Government has taken the precautionary measure of recommending public gatherings involving more than 500 people be cancelled. The cancellation does not extend to schools, universities, shops, supermarkets, public transport or airports. As the advice is changing, it is important that you check current public health advice.

People organising smaller events should undertake risk assessments in partnership with local and national public health authorities. The assessment should be reviewed and updated regularly through planning and delivery of the event.

The decision to hold, restrict, modify, postpone or cancel your event should be based on a thorough assessment of the risk. Before going ahead with your planned event, you should consider the factors detailed below and appropriate steps you can take to reduce the risk.

Things to consider when organising public gatherings

The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

The virus is most likely spread from person-to-person through:

- direct close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

Incubation period

Most people who have been exposed to COVID-19 will develop symptoms within 14 days. More information is available at Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Exposures thought to increase risk

Close contact with a confirmed or suspected case for more than 15 minutes or sharing a small room for more than two hours is likely to increase risk of transmission.

Some questions to consider when planning your event

You should review all aspects of the event that may increase risk of transmission. This will allow you to apply appropriate controls.

- **Process:** Does your event include procedures or processes where people may share physical objects (i.e. pens) or fill out forms (registration, electoral information)?
- **Duration:** How long is your event – hours or days?
- **Accommodation:** Does it require people to share accommodation?
- **Proximity:** Does it include any activities that require people to be close to one another? Will there be crowding or close contact?
- **Catering arrangements**: How are food and beverages served?
- **Venue:** How large are the rooms? How are they ventilated? What furnishing or equipment is available? What are bathrooms like? Is it indoor or outdoor?
- **Cleaning:** What are the cleaning arrangements?
- **Participants:** How large is the gathering? Where do the participants come from? Are there any who may be more vulnerable to COVID-19, such as older people? Are there any who are key personnel, such as health care workers or emergency services?
- **Contingency planning:** What plans do you have in place in case someone becomes unwell and what support is available? Is there an alternative event or process for people who become unwell and cannot attend? Do you have insurance for your event?
- **Communication:** How do you plan to communicate with participants and staff?
- **Controls:** How will you reduce the risk (see below)?

This list is not exhaustive. Every event is different. You will need to ensure you have considered all the potential risks associated with your particular event.

Actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at your gathering

Top 10 actions:

1. Undertake an thorough risk assessment
2. Promote preventive actions amongst your staff – lead by example
3. Consult local public health authorities on your level of risk
4. Advise sick employees and participants stay at home
5. Plan ways to reduce in-person contact for participants and staff
6. Provide and promote COVID-19 prevention supplies eg alcohol sanitisers
7. Plan for increased levels of staff absences and those who turn up sick
8. Identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become sick
9. Ensure high standards of routine environmental cleaning
10. Keep staff and participants informed of the actions you are taking

Before your event, review the existing emergency operations plan at your venue

- Consider key prevention strategies. Develop a contingency plan that addresses various scenarios, including management of people who become unwell or a local outbreak.
- Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders. Collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts. Clearly identify each partner's role, responsibilities, and the decision-making authority.
- Contact your local and national public health department for advice.

Address key prevention strategies to decrease risk of transmission

- **Cleaning:** Ensure your plan is adequate to reduce transmission. Ensure event spaces, surfaces and objects are regularly cleaned with disinfectant.
- **Behaviour:** Define and promote appropriate behaviour to staff and participants to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19. Recommended behaviours include:
  - Advise people not attend if they are unwell
  - Cover mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
  - Provide bins and put used tissues in the bin straight away
  - Wash hands with soap and water often
  - Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
  - Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
  - Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
  - Do not attend if you have been to a higher risk country or been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the past two weeks.
- **Hygiene:** Define and promote appropriate hygiene behaviour to staff and participants to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19. Recommended behaviours include:
  - Provide hand washing guidance
  - Promote regular and thorough hand washing by staff and participants
  - Provide sanitising hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the event (particularly entry or high use areas such as a registration desk)
  - Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled
  - Display posters promoting hand washing
  - Ensure participants and staff can access somewhere they can wash their hands with soap and water
  - Promote good respiratory hygiene eg display posters
  - Consider a supply of face masks and tissues for people who develop a runny nose or cough at the event and provide closed bins for disposal.

Communication

- Event organisers should establish direct links with local and national public health authorities. This should include the local provider of health services for the event.
- There should be a nominated liaison person in the organising team and also one in the designated public health agency. Contact information should be shared, and contacts should be available 24 hours.
- Regular contact should be maintained throughout the planning period to share information, risk assessments and plans.
- Channels of communication between agencies and organisers, and with the public, should be agreed in advance.
- **Before the event:** Ensure you let participants and staff know how you plan to reduce risk. Ensure your advice considers people who may be more vulnerable. Advise participants not to attend if unwell or if they have travelled to a higher risk country or been exposed to a person with COVID-19 in the preceding 14 days.
- **At the event:** Use multiple modes of communication (i.e. posters, handouts, electronic media). Reiterate to people who are unwell that they should not attend. Let people know what to do if they become unwell.
- **After the event:** Ensure you can contact participants if someone becomes unwell and advise what actions should be taken.

Education and training

- **Staff:** Provide education and training to staff on preventing transmission. Ensure they are aware of appropriate hygiene measures and that they should not attend if unwell.
- **Participants:** Provide advice on behaviours which will reduce risk of transmission. Advise participants not to attend if unwell or if they have travelled to a higher risk country or been exposed to a person with COVID-19 in the preceding 14 days.
- Display posters and distribute information about COVID-19 at your event.

Other controls

- Consider a flexible refund policy for people who may not be able to attend.
- Consider actions to be taken if you need to cancel or postpone your event
- Plan for staff absences.

This list is not exhaustive and your event may need specific controls which are not detailed here. You should consider your individual event and apply appropriate controls.

More information

For additional information about mass gatherings, go to https://www.who.int/publications-detail/key-planning-recommendations-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-the-current-covid-19-outbreak and https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of your state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness—not coronavirus.