

Large Gatherings and Community Events in Alaska

ADVISORY DOCUMENT PHASE III-IV

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Background

Large events and mass gatherings can contribute to the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by people who are infected and attend these events. Examples of large events and mass gatherings include conferences, festivals, parades, concerts, sporting events, weddings, and other types of assemblies. These events can be planned not only by organizations and communities but also by individuals.

Any gathering of people confers risk for communicable disease transmission, and the risk increases with increasing numbers. Larger gatherings (e.g., more than 250 people) offer many opportunities for person-to-person contact and therefore pose an elevated risk for COVID-19 transmission. Overall counts for events include all *attendees* during the entire course of the event, such as:

- Participants, patrons and/or spectators
- Staff, vendors and volunteers
- Players and performers
- Security and medical personnel

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19; therefore, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings in close proximity to others (within about 6 feet). These droplets can land in the mouths or noses or be inhaled into the lungs of people who are nearby.

COVID-19 can be spread by both symptomatic and asymptomatic people. It can also be transmitted by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Various congregate gatherings have played a notable role in the spread of COVID-19 nationally. During February 2020, the number of confirmed cases originating in the United States was low and appeared contained; however, during the last week of February, several large gathering events led to acceleration of COVID-19 transmission.¹

Pre-event Considerations

1. Refer to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 guidance on large events for planning purposes: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>
2. Determine if you are able to meet the appropriate state and local guidance/requirements in the community where the event will occur.
3. Consider alternatives for event staff and participants who are at increased risk for complications from COVID-19 (e.g., people 65 and older and those with chronic medical conditions)
 - See: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

¹ Public Health Response to the Initiation and Spread of Pandemic COVID-19 in the United States, February 24–April 21, 2020. Weekly / May 8, 2020 / 69(18);551–556.

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e2.htm?s_cid=mm6918e2_w

4. Establish a safety and mitigation plan that includes procedures to care for someone who becomes ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the event, and include a review by local health professionals and emergency responders
5. Establish mitigation strategies
 - a. Encourage the use of face coverings for everyone at your event, as appropriate (e.g., this would not be appropriate for athletes engaging in strenuous activity)
 - b. Establish opportunities for frequent hand washing/sanitizing
 - c. Establish ways to maintain at least 6 feet of distancing between non-household members, whenever possible
 - i. This may include distancing tables, creating one-way entrances, limiting the number of people at the event, distancing people who are standing in line, and holding gatherings outside rather than inside
 - ii. In events with assigned seating, this could involve keeping seats or rows empty between non-household groups
 - iii. In events without assigned seating, this could involve reviewing the venue's square footage and estimating the number of household groups to determine maximum capacity
 - d. Establish cleaning and disinfection procedures, paying extra attention to high-touch surfaces and high-use areas, such as restrooms and portable toilets, as well as food and beverage service locations
 - e. Use products that meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) criteria for use against COVID-19, found at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
 - f. Consider a virtual platform for participants (and pre-event orientation)
 - g. Refer to [CDC's guidance for large gatherings](#) for additional mitigation strategies

Communication to Attendees

Communication can take the form of electronic notification, posters, signs, or verbal announcements. Important messages include the following:

1. The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person through talking, singing, coughing, sneezing, etc.
2. Large events where people are in close proximity to each other pose a greater risk of spreading COVID-19
3. Stay 6 feet or more away from non-household members
4. Wear a face covering when in a public setting and in close contact with non-household members
5. Stay home if you have any symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, decreased appetite, diminished sense of taste or smell, diarrhea, fatigue, headache, muscle/joint aches, nausea, rash, runny nose, sore throat, or sputum production
6. If you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 while at the event, please go home immediately
7. Wash or sanitize your hands often
8. People in higher-risk groups should consult with their healthcare provider about attending large events

Protect Your Staff and Volunteers

1. Provide face coverings for all staff, security, vendors and volunteers
2. Consider requiring staff, security, vendors and volunteers to wear a face covering

3. Provide physical guides, such as markers on the ground, to ensure that participants remain 6 feet from staff assigned to stationary locations
4. Provide physical barriers in locations where maintaining distance is difficult (e.g., Plexiglas partitions at host, ticket, food and beverage stands)
5. Use touch-free operational methods, such as electronic tickets
6. Provide your staff with training about COVID-19 transmission and how to reduce the risk of transmission while working
7. Train staff using virtual platforms, whenever possible
8. Inform symptomatic staff members to stay home
9. If a staff member develops illness symptoms during the event, they should be isolated from other people and sent home immediately
10. No employee should report to work within 72 hours of experiencing a fever

Maintain Records and Contact Information

If a COVID-19 exposure occurs at the event and contact tracing is necessary, public health workers may need to notify some attendees. Contact tracing is when public health workers identify and inform people who have had close contact with an infected person. To help public health workers complete contact tracing, organizers are encouraged to do the following:

1. Collect contact information for attendees, whenever possible
2. Maintain seating charts or seating assignments and contact information, if possible
3. Maintain staffing assignments, times and days

There is a state listserv you can join at <http://list.state.ak.us/mailman/listinfo/largeeventscovid> to connect organizers of large events including concerts (indoor and outdoor), recreational events (running competitions), other sports events including tournaments, sports games with spectators, fairs and festivals, parades, free concerts in the park, etc. The listserv will be used to distribute information, resources and announce opportunities for facilitated discussion between organizers of large gathering and community events during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information you may contact:

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