

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Events and Public Gatherings

Washington State is seeing an increased number of cases of COVID-19. We currently don't know what the impact will be statewide. However, state agencies, LHJs, and tribal nations can take steps to help mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Events and public gatherings, such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and religious gatherings create environments where a virus can spread quickly among event workers, participants, and attendees. Depending on the phase of the outbreak in your area, you may need to modify, postpone, or cancel large events. This packet includes the information you need to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 at large events.

FOR ALL WASHINGTON STATE AGENCIES

Be aware of large events happening in your buildings.

Check with appropriate staff about planned training, conferences, and other gatherings happening in your buildings. Ask how many people are expected to attend, review guidance in Thresholds 1 through 3 (TH1-3) to assist in preparation and decision-making for canceling events (Pages 3 – 10).

FOR LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS

Be aware of large events happening in your jurisdiction.

You will find a list of some events planned for this month included in this packet. This list is from the [Washington State Fusion Center \(WSFC\)](#), a partnership between federal government and state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT), and private sector partners to share threat-related information. (**Note: The list of events is not for public dissemination. It is not an all-inclusive list. It lists events that have been reported to WSFC or events that WSFC analysts have located.**) This list is broken out into 9 regions. Some events have special event threat assessments, showing a map of the event, critical infrastructure, and previous event issues. The current month does not have numbers of attendees, but future months will. If you want to know the expected numbers of attendees for this month's events, you can contact WSFC. We recommend reaching out to event organizers with the TH1-3 guidance provided.

Health officers at the local level and state level have the authority to recommend the voluntary cancellation of events or cancel events themselves.

See **Intervention 10: Recommend or Order Cancellation of Major Public and Large Private Gatherings** (Pages 11-14).

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.

Risk Thresholds

Depending on the level of risk (or threshold), we recommend different strategies for events. Please provide relevant information to event organizers and other partners, as needed. (See related pages.)

Low Risk -Threshold 1 (TH1): Unmitigated or uncontained community transmission is occurring elsewhere but there may not be evidence of significant community transmission in WA yet. In such a circumstance, authorities should consider initiating minimally restrictive, or burdensome, but effective mitigation measures.

Moderate risk - Threshold 2 (TH2): There is evidence that unmitigated or uncontained community transmission of the disease is occurring in 2 large jurisdictions within the state.

High Risk - Threshold 3 (TH3): Widespread community transmission of disease within Washington State.

Detailed guidance on TH1-3 begins on the next page. These pages are written for use by the event organizers and venues feel free to send them the information to follow.

COVID-19 Mass Gathering Guidance: Low Risk-Threshold 1

Washington State is seeing an increased number of cases of COVID-19. We currently don't know what the impact will be statewide. As an event planner, you can take steps to help mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Events or large gatherings, such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and religious gatherings create environments where a virus can spread quickly among event workers, participants, and attendees. Depending on the phase of the outbreak in your area, you may need to modify, postpone, or cancel your event(s).

Low Risk-Threshold 1 Definition

Unmitigated or uncontained community transmission is occurring elsewhere but there may not be evidence of significant community transmission in your area yet. In such a circumstance, authorities should consider initiating minimally restrictive, or burdensome, but effective mitigation measures.

You have an event coming up. What should you do first?

1. Develop a communication plan for sharing information with staff and attendees. (See below for guidance.)
2. Identify strategies to increase space or limit contact between attendees at your event during a disease outbreak. For example, modify seating arrangements to increase space between attendees, find a larger venue, stagger event schedules, and discourage attendees from crowding around bathrooms and food stations.
3. Plan ways to care for attendees and staff who get sick during an event and to separate them from attendees and staff who are well.
4. Have supplies on hand for workers and attendees, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and disposable facemasks. Disposable facemasks should be provided if someone appears to be sick at your event.
5. Explore alternative site design and set-up, such as:
 - Prop doors open to avoid touching (May need to consider additional security.)
 - Increase ventilation within the facility
 - Increase the number of hygiene stations, including hand sanitizer stations
6. Connect with your local public health department to review or develop your plan for your event or gathering.
7. Consider sick leave policies for staff. Plan for alternative coverage of job duties as needed.
8. Identify ways to reach staff and attendees with information about the event and risks of attendance (for example, web-based broadcasts, email, television, or radio).

9. Evaluate your reimbursement policies.

Communicate with event staff prior to the event.

- Staff should take the following precautions to prevent possible transmission before, during, and after the event:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Cough and sneeze into the elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands.
 - Practice social distancing. Stay six or more feet away from people.
 - Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces in your home and workplaces.
- Encourage staff to remain home if they are sick with cough, sneezing and/or fever. Inform them about sick leave policies and/or the ability to work from home, if possible.
- Inform them of your plans for communicating with attendees.
- Provide them with information on any venue and process changes that will help mitigate the spread of illness.
 - Training on how to address obviously ill attendees, such as respectfully asking them to leave the facility or wear a mask.
 - Setting up barriers between staff and attendees. For example, placing tables or other barriers between staff and attendees to keep a six-foot distance. If that isn't possible, staff should stand to the side of traffic flow.
- Encourage staff to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects often (doorknobs, countertops, etc.).

Communicate with attendees prior to the event.

- Provide a brief description of the current status of COVID-19 in your area. (See [Washington State Department of Health's 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak](#) for the latest information.)
- Encourage those in a higher-risk group not to attend your event. People over 60, those who are immune-compromised, and/or those with underlying chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of having serious complications from COVID-19.
- Recommend that attendees stay home if you are sick with cough, sneezing and/or fever.
- For those who still plan to attend, recommend that they can take the following precautions to prevent possible transmission before, during, and after the event:
 1. Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 2. Cough and sneeze into the elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands.
 3. Practice social distancing. Stay 6 or more feet away from people.
 4. Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces in your home and workplaces.
- Give attendees clear information about what your organization or venue plans to do to protect them during the event. (See guidance below.)

- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers in your communications. The information you share should be easy to understand and accessible to all attendees. Learn more about reaching people of diverse languages and cultures by visiting: www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html.

Protect attendees and reduce spread by building disease prevention measures into your event planning.

- Identify strategies to increase space or limit contact between attendees during a disease outbreak. For example, modify seating arrangements to increase space between attendees, find a larger venue, stagger event schedules, and discourage attendees from crowding around bathrooms and food stations.
- Plan ways to care for attendees and staff who get sick during an event and to separate them from attendees and staff who are well.
- Have supplies on hand for workers and attendees, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and disposable facemasks. Disposable facemasks should be provided if someone appears to be sick at your event.
- Explore alternative site design and set-up, such as:
 - Prop doors open to avoid touching (May need to consider additional security.)
 - Increase ventilation within the facility
 - Increase the number of hygiene stations, including hand sanitizer stations
- Clean frequently touched surfaces such as handrails and countertops with disinfectant cleaners often during the event.
 - You can use a bleach-and-water solution or disinfectant with a label that says “EPA approved” for killing viruses and bacteria. Always follow directions on product labels.
- Increase ventilation within the facility.
- Post signs sharing how attendees can protect themselves and others at your venue. Consider posting signs at entrances and in bathrooms.
 - [DOH Coronavirus Factsheet](#)
 - [Slow the Spread of Germs Poster CDC \(pdf\)](#)
 - [Spanish Version CDC \(pdf\)](#)
 - [CDC Handwashing Posters](#)

COVID-19 Mass Gathering Guidance: Moderate Risk-Threshold 2

Washington State is seeing an increased number of cases of COVID-19. We currently don't know what the impact will be statewide. As an event planner, you can take steps to help mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Events or large gatherings, such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and religious gatherings create environments where a virus can spread quickly among event workers, participants, and attendees. Depending on the phase of the outbreak in your area, you may need to modify, postpone, or cancel your event(s).

Moderate Risk-Threshold 2 Definition

There is evidence that unmitigated or uncontained community transmission of the disease is occurring in two large jurisdictions within the state.

You have an event coming up. What should you do?

Consider canceling or rescheduling your event if it is located within an area that has community transmission of disease or if a large number of attendees are anticipated to come from these impacted areas. Community transmission means that illness is spreading between people in the community and it is unclear who might be contagious.

Consider alternative attendance such as web-based, televised only, remote attendance options. If you determine to hold the event, be aware that the health officer may determine the risk is too high and may order the event canceled.

Considerations for canceling/rescheduling the event

- What does your Local Health Officer recommend?
- Do you have enough staff to operate your event?
 - Have you addressed staffing fears?
 - Is a high volume of your staff out sick?
 - Do you have access to surge staffing or have you developed surge staffing plans?
- Can you provide for the safety of all attendees?
 - Do you have hygiene stations for handwashing?
 - Do you have appropriate space for allowing 6 feet distancing between attendees?
 - Do you have processes in place to exclude sick attendees?
- Is the event indoors or outdoors?
 - Outdoor venues have better air circulation and permit more distance between people than indoor environments.
- Are attendees predominantly from vulnerable groups?

- Over 60 years old, those who are immune-compromised, those with underlying chronic health conditions.
- Can you use increased medical surveillance of attendees?
 - Non-invasive monitoring
 - Trained medical staff onsite
 - Separate room for evaluating potentially ill persons
- Are there alternatives to holding the event?
 - Teleconference
 - Online
 - other

If you cancel the event:

- Consider alternatives to holding your event.
 - Web-based attendance
 - Televised only (no audience)
 - Other remote attendance options
 - Reschedule the event
- Communicate to your staff and attendees that the event is canceled and why.
- Consider how you might reimburse attendees.

If the event is permitted to continue, consider the following steps:

1. Develop a communication plan for sharing information with staff and attendees. (See below for guidance.)
2. Connect with your local public health department to review or develop your plan for your event or gathering.
3. Consider flexible attendance and sick leave policies for staff. Plan for alternative coverage of job duties as needed. (Alert the local health department if there are large increases in absenteeism due to symptoms like those accompanying COVID-19.)
4. Identify ways to reach staff and attendees with information about the event and risks of attendance (for example, web-based broadcasts, email, television, or radio).
5. Evaluate your reimbursement policies.

Communicate with event staff prior to the event.

- Staff should take the following precautions to prevent possible transmission before, during, and after the event:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Cough and sneeze into the elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands.
 - Practice social distancing. Stay six or more feet away from people.
 - Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces in your home and workplaces.
- Encourage staff to remain home if they are sick with cough, sneezing and/or fever. Inform them about sick leave policies and/or the ability to work from home, if possible.

- Inform them of your plans for communicating with attendees.
- Provide them with information on any venue and process changes that will help mitigate the spread of illness.
 - Training on how to address obviously ill attendees, such as respectfully asking them to leave the facility.
 - Setting up barriers between staff and attendees. For example, placing tables or other barriers between staff and attendees to keep a six-foot distance. If that isn't possible, staff should stand to the side of traffic flow.
- Encourage staff to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects often.

Communicate with attendees prior to the event.

- Provide a brief description of the current status of COVID-19 in your area. (See [Washington State Department of Health's 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak](#) for the latest information.)
- Encourage those in a higher-risk group not to attend your event. People over 60, those who are immune-compromised, and/or those with underlying chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of having serious complications from COVID-19.
- Recommend that attendees stay home if you are sick with cough, sneezing and/or fever.
- For those who still plan to attend, recommend that they can take the following precautions to prevent possible transmission before, during, and after the event:
 1. Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 2. Cough and sneeze into the elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands.
 3. Practice social distancing. Stay 6 or more feet away from people.
 4. Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces in your home and workplaces.
- Give attendees clear information about what your organization or venue plans to do to protect them. (See guidance below.)

Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers in your communications. The information you share should be easy to understand and accessible to all attendees. Learn more about reaching people of diverse languages and cultures by visiting: www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html.

Protect attendees and reduce spread by building disease prevention measures into your event planning.

- Identify strategies to increase space or limit contact between attendees during a flu pandemic. For example, modify seating arrangements to increase space between attendees, find a larger venue, stagger event schedules, and discourage attendees from crowding around bathrooms and food stations.

- Plan ways to care for attendees and staff who get sick during an event and to separate them from attendees and staff who are well.
- Have supplies on hand for workers and attendees, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and trash baskets.
- Explore alternative site design and set-up, such as:
 - Prop doors open to avoid touching (May need to consider additional security.)
 - Increase ventilation within the facility
 - Increase the number of hygiene stations, including hand sanitizer stations
- Clean frequently touched surfaces such as handrails and countertops with disinfectant cleaners often during the event.
- Increase ventilation within the facility.
- Post signs sharing how attendees can protect themselves and others at your venue. Consider posting signs at entrances and in bathrooms.
 - [DOH Coronavirus Factsheet](#)
 - [Slow the Spread of Germs Poster CDC \(pdf\)](#)
 - [Spanish Version CDC \(pdf\)](#)
 - [CDC Handwashing Posters](#)

COVID-19 Mass Gathering Guidance: High Risk-Threshold 3

Washington State is seeing an increased number of cases of COVID-19. We currently don't know what the impact will be statewide. As an event planner, you can take steps to help mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Events or large gatherings, such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and religious gatherings create environments where a virus can spread quickly among event workers and attendees. Depending on the phase of the outbreak in your area, you may need to modify, postpone, or cancel your event(s).

High Risk-Threshold 3 Definition

Widespread community transmission of disease within Washington State.

You have an event coming up. What should you do?

- All events that involve the potential for disease transmission that cannot accommodate alternative attendance should be canceled or postponed.
- Consider alternatives to holding your event.
 - Web-based attendance
 - Televised only (no audience)
 - Other remote attendance options
 - Reschedule the event
- Communicate to your staff and attendees that the event is canceled and why.
- Consider how you might reimburse attendees.

We know it is hard to cancel events that you have been planning for a long time. However, social distancing measures, such as canceling or postponing mass gatherings, reduce opportunities for person-to-person virus transmission and can help delay and slow the spread of the disease as well as save lives. We appreciate your help in this effort.

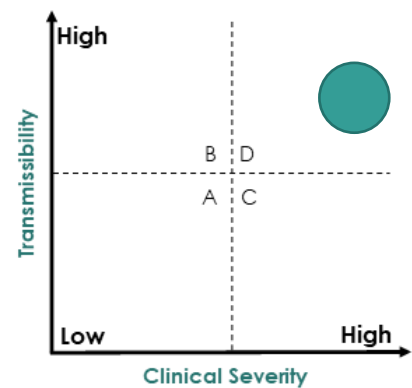
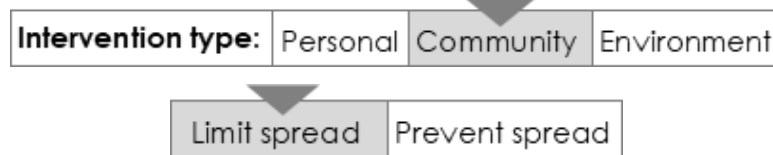
Additional COVID-19 Resources

- [DOH Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) – updated information and resources daily
- [Local Health Jurisdictions](#)
- [Workplace and Employers](#)
- [Persons Who are at Higher Risk for Serious Illness](#)
- [Communities and Community Organizations](#)
- [Stigma Reduction](#)
- [How Can I Be Prepared for a COVID-19 Outbreak?](#)

Intervention 10: Recommend or Order Cancellation of Major Public and Large Private Gatherings

Reduce the probability of transmission by reducing the number of interpersonal contacts.

Transmissibility (1-5)	4
Clinical severity (1-7)	5-7
Recommend implementing at	D



Rationale for Use as a Public Health Strategy

Social distancing measures, such as cancellation or postponement of mass gatherings, reduce opportunities for person-to-person virus transmission and can help delay the spread and slow the exponential growth of disease spread. The optimal strategy is to implement these measures simultaneously in places where people gather.

Canceling mass gatherings, in combination with other social distancing measures (e.g., patient isolation, quarantine of exposed persons, and school closures), may help reduce virus transmission.

Success Factors: Success depends upon event sponsor compliance and authorities' ability to enforce effectively.

Possible Drawbacks: May result in revenue loss, public outrage, or political backlash, and may disproportionately affect certain cultural and community groups.

Possible Benefits: Reduces opportunities for widespread disease transmission by reducing interpersonal contacts and increasing social distance.

Settings and Use

- Social distancing measures can be implemented in a range of community settings, including public places where people gather (e.g., parks, houses of worship, theaters, sports arenas).

- Modifying, canceling, or postponing events is an approach that might reduce face-to-face contact in community settings.

Jurisdictional Authority and Key Decision Makers

Local

Key Decision Makers: Local health officers and the local board of health have the authority to control and prevent the spread of contagious or infectious diseases within their jurisdiction and to inform the public about the nature of the disease and prevention methods. This includes issuing orders to cancel events.

Key Stakeholders: Decision should be made in coordination with local elected officials (such as mayor, city council, county council, and/or county executive), emergency managers, local law enforcement, impacted businesses, proprietors, cultural and religious leaders, event sponsors and event organizers.

Applicable Law(s) for Decision Makers:

- [RCW 70.05.060 – Powers and duties of local board of health](#)
- [RCW 70.05.070 – Local health officer – powers and duties](#)
- [WAC 246-100-036 – Responsibilities and duties – Local health officers](#)
- [WAC 246-100-070 – Enforcement of local health officer orders](#)

State

Key Decision Makers: In an emergency or when a local health officer consents or does not act, the Secretary of Health may exercise the same authority as a local health officer to control and prevent disease and issue orders to cancel events. The Secretary of Health also has the authority to promote public health activities and educational campaigns.

The Governor has broad authority to proclaim a state of emergency in order to preserve life, health, property, or public peace ([RCW 43.06.220](#)). A governor declared emergency could trigger limitations such as curfews, prohibitions of people on streets and open areas, limit the use of streets, highways or public ways; or other broad restrictions outlined by the law, such as prohibiting travel.

Washington's laws against discrimination are outlined in RCW 49.60. Public officials should consider how communities may be impacted and take action to remove the stigma that may marginalize or discriminate against groups.

Applicable Law(s):

- [RCW 43.06.220 – State of emergency – powers of governor pursuant to proclamation](#)
- [RCW 43.70.020\(3\) – Department created](#)
- [RCW 43.70.130 – Powers and duties of the Secretary of Health](#)
- [RCW 70.05.070 – Local health officer – powers and duties](#) (can be exercised by Secretary)
- [RCW 49.60 – Discrimination – Human Rights Commission](#)

Tribal

Tribal governments have the authority and responsibility to control communicable diseases on tribal lands and are expected to do so according to the laws, rules, and regulations of the tribal government. They may decide their own criteria for canceling large gatherings.

Federal

Key Decision Makers: The federal government has independent authority when emergencies cross state and national borders.

Applicable Law(s):

- [42 U.S.C. § 247d – Public health emergencies](#)
- [42 U.S.C. § 264 - Regulations to control communicable diseases](#)
- [28 CFR Part 35 – Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in State and Local Government Services](#)

Decisional Objectives/Key Decision Points

- Establish guidance/requirements needed to request or order the cancellation of gatherings.
- Identify affected events and disproportionately impacted communities.
 - Research upcoming cultural and religious holidays, observances, and events.
 - Assess economic impact for both individuals and larger communities (loss of wages, tourism revenue)
- Plan community engagement efforts, methods, and approaches that are responsive to the needs, preferences, and values of the community.
- Develop strategies to gain buy-in from event organizers and leadership
- Plan for enforcement of cancellations
 - Partner with trusted community leaders
 - Assess need, benefit, and potential unintended consequences of working with law enforcement/security personnel.
 - Create mitigation strategies, as needed, to address any real, potential, or perceived issues or consequences of enforcement activities.
- Determine whether events should be pre-emptively canceled.
- Proactively address unintended consequences that inequitably impact historically marginalized individuals and communities may further erode trust with governmental systems needed for overall public health and future response efforts.
- Ensure all strategies, communications, and engagement are culturally and linguistically appropriate and meet readability and accessibility guidelines.

Healthcare Considerations

- Consider the impact on the healthcare system and their current capacity and if the intervention would reduce or increase burden.
- Determine if implementation would mitigate burden on health care system to maintain essential medical services, especially for underserved populations.
- Identify if this would decrease or increase absenteeism among health care workers.
- Potential legal and ethical issues involving altered standards of care.

Implementation Methods

- **Health officer order or request that major government-sponsored events/gatherings be canceled or postponed.**
 - Meet with event organizers, committees and employees.
 - Explain the situation

- Offer alternatives, if any, including a new location, rescheduling the event, or changing entrance rules.
 - Government-sponsored events or gatherings may be affected anyway due to the Continuity of Operations Plan.
 - Work with public information officers/communication teams to get the information out with relevant Q&As and FAQs
- **Create and distribute accessible, public messaging about closures**
 - General messaging about why these measures are being taken.
 - Work with communications team to create messages that:
 - Meet readability and accessibility guidelines.
 - Are culturally and linguistically relevant.
 - Are translated into the most spoken languages in the affected area.
 - Are relevant/adaptable to the changing nature of the incident/outbreak.
 - Communicate through multiple platforms and channels appropriate to the affected communities
 - Engage with community leaders or representatives for advice and buy-in.
 - Provide messages to LHJs and other partners to share with their constituents.
 - Provide consistent messaging throughout the state via media outreach.
 - Develop tailored messaging for disproportionately impacted communities.
 - Specific messaging about the cancellation of specific events.
 - Display appropriate messaging in places where attendees may see them.
 - Work with event organizers and to use their communication methods.

Special Considerations

- Requires excellent and effective communication mechanisms to notify the community of details and rationale. Communication must be culturally relevant and in a language and format that the audience can understand to be effective.
- Any attempts to implement social distancing in cultural & religious gatherings should be informed by cultural & religious leaders.
- Canceling events could affect civic participation and social cohesion. It could also create an opportunity for discrimination if only certain events are closed.
- Postponing the event may benefit or negatively impact employees as well as attendees or participants, depending on the event and the individual's role.
- This intervention will require detailed coordination between state, local government officials, and community organizations/leaders/groups.
- This intervention will require detailed coordination with the event organizers and planners.
- Cancellation of large events may affect individual income, revenue, employment, economic opportunity, and commerce.
- Coordination with the Office of the Governor and/or local government leadership may be needed.
- There should be consistency in which events are canceled. Cancellation should not be based on the communities likely to attend or work at the event.
- Culturally and religiously diverse communities may be disproportionately impacted.
- Families on the brink of housing insecurity may be disproportionately impacted by loss of wages, potentially increasing risk of missing rent payments, potentially increasing risk of eviction and homelessness. Homeless individuals already experience barriers to health care, services, and information.

- Unintended consequences that inequitably impact historically marginalized individuals and communities may further erode trust with governmental systems needed for overall public health and future response efforts.