

Novel Coronavirus: Events, Public Gatherings, and Schools Guidance

Background:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus strain that can spread from person to person, causing severe illness including pneumonia in some people.

Symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. The most common symptoms reported are:

Fever



Cough



Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing



Purpose of Guidance:

The purpose of the document is to provide recommendations and guidance for events and public gatherings to help limit people's exposure to COVID-19 to protect people attending and working the event as well as the community. These recommendations are intended for organizers and staff responsible for planning events with a large number of people in attendance (more than 250 people). Additional guidance is provided for school closures. This guidance is not intended to close office buildings or workplaces with 250 or more people.

Events include concerts, festivals, conferences, worship services, sporting events, and other such events.

One critically important way to slow the spread of respiratory viral infections, like COVID-19, is to reduce close contact (increasing social distancing).

Nebraska DHHS outlines two (2) scenarios that should be considered by event organizers and communities, as well as, closure guidance for schools.

Community transmission (i.e. where we cannot identify a direct link to a case) triggers for closure by community size or region:

- For Omaha: 2 cases of community transmission
- For Lincoln: 1-2 cases of community transmission
- For other Nebraska communities and Nebraska's Education Service Units (ESUs): 1 case of community transmission



Before community transmission it is critical that:

- Event organizers:
 - **Limit the size of events and public gatherings (e.g. parades, theaters, sporting events, etc.) to less than 250 people.**
 - Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.
 - Create an emergency operations plan for how to modify, cancel, or postpone the event if community transmission begins in the community.
 - Start the event and use event communications to promote everyday preventive health messages, including:
 - ◆ Attendees and workers must stay home if they are sick.
 - ◆ Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - ◆ When washing with soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - ◆ Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing with a tissue then throw it away.
 - ◆ Encourage participants to minimize close contact (e.g. no hand shaking or hugging).
 - Provide prevention supplies as available. Plan to have extra supplies for attendees and workers like sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, and tissues. Promoting frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - If workers or attendees develop symptoms, provide a designated space separated from the other attendees/workers for them to remain until they are able to go home.
 - If the event location, audience, or other major details can be modified consider:
 - ◆ Televising the event
 - ◆ Held outdoors or move to a location where people can spread out more (e.g. larger venue)
 - ◆ Teleconferences/video-conferences
 - ◆ Reducing the audience size (e.g. immediate family member attendance, limited number of tickets)
 - ◆ Spreading people out (e.g. less individuals at tables, spreading desks apart)
 - ◆ Or other ways to limit the number of people gathered in an enclosed space
 - ◆ Consider postponing an event to a later date.

Consider creating refund policies or remote participation opportunities to further encourage staying home if they are sick or caring for the sick.

After community transmission has begun:

- Event organizers:
 - **Limit the size of events and public gatherings (e.g. parades, theaters, sporting events, etc.) to 20-50 people.**
 - Put your emergency operations and communications plans in action.
 - Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.
 - Anticipate events may need to be modified (e.g. teleconference/video-conference), canceled, or postponed.
 - Cancel events primarily for or attended by older adults and people with chronic medical conditions at higher risk for severe illness.
 - Start the event and use event communications to promote everyday preventive health messages, including:
 - ◆ Encourage attendees and workers to stay home if they are sick.
Consider creating refund policies or remote participation opportunities to further encourage staying home if they are sick or caring for the sick.

- ◆ Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - ◆ When washing with soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - ◆ Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing with a tissue then throw it away.
 - ◆ Encourage participants to minimize close contact (e.g. recommend no hand shaking or hugging).
- Provide prevention supplies as available. Plan to have extra supplies for attendees and workers like sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, and tissues. Promoting frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - If workers or attendees develop symptoms, provide a designated space separated from the other attendees/workers for them to remain until they are able to go home.
 - If the event location, audience or other major details can be modified consider:
 - ◆ Televising the event
 - ◆ Held outdoors or move to a location where people can spread out more (e.g. larger venue)
 - ◆ Teleconferences/video-conferences
 - ◆ Reducing the audience size (e.g. immediate family member attendance, limited number of tickets)
 - ◆ Spreading people out (e.g. less individuals at tables, spreading desks apart)
 - ◆ Or other ways to limit the number of people gathered in an enclosed space
 - ◆ Consider postponing an event to a later date.
 - Maintain a registration list of attendees and staff. This will significantly assist local public health in contact tracing in the event a COVID-19 case should later be identified as having attended the event.

- **School Closure guidance for after community transmission has begun:**

Reports suggest that school age students are not shown to be a high risk group for serious illness from COVID-19. Despite this, closures are recommended to protect family members who might be in a high risk group, the community, and minimize the spread of illness.

- It is recommended to close schools in the event community transmission has begun in your area.
 - ◆ **Schools should consider modifying attendance to classes (e.g. remote options like video-conference, recorded sessions, etc.) or cancel classes for 6-8 weeks and reevaluate reopening every 2 weeks thereafter for community transmission.**
 - ◆ Schools should modify, postpone, or cancel extracurricular events.
 - ◆ Collaborate and coordinate with community partners including the local health departments.