



MASS GATHERINGS & EVENTS

INDOOR & OUTDOOR

Overview

To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, facilities and organizers of mass gatherings and events are required to adhere to the capacity limit of 50 people or less and maintain physical distancing of 2 meters between people at this time. Implement enhanced health and sanitary protocols as provided in the General Operational Guidelines.

Continue to monitor developments relating to COVID-19 with your local, regional and national Public Health Authorities for changes and updates.

What are mass gatherings?

- Mass gatherings are settings or events where large numbers of people may be in close contact
- Examples include spiritual and cultural events, performances, sporting events, festivals, and conferences
- They can be indoor and/or outdoor events

What are the public health risks of mass gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Mass gatherings can contribute to the transmission of respiratory pathogens, such as the virus that causes COVID-19
- Mass gatherings that attract participants from other affected countries or regions may increase the risk of its importation to Canada, and/or promote its spread within Canada

Should mass gathering plans be changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that event organizers and planners cancel or postpone in-person gatherings in alignment with the recommendations of their local public health authorities, and where possible, offer virtual/online alternatives
- Mass gatherings are all different, so planning decisions must be done on a case-by-case basis
- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends that this risk assessment framework be used to systematically consider the characteristics of the mass gathering and its participants, identify risks and their weight (importance) in decision-making, understand the public health rationale, and consider risk mitigation strategies
- The social and economic impacts of canceling or postponing mass gatherings must also be considered
- The local PHA can be consulted for further guidance
- Risk-informed decisions about public health actions may range from enhancing communications to participants, to implementing risk mitigation strategies, to postponing or canceling the event

Meeting Considerations

- Use online teaching and virtual conferences where possible
- Ensure rooms are large enough to allow appropriate physical distancing
- Ensure rooms are properly disinfected and ventilated
- Field/outdoor demonstrations/presentations must allow for appropriate distancing

Additional Resources

- **Public Health Agency of Canada:** <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assessment.html>
- **World Health Organization:** Key Planning Recommendations for Mass Gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak. Feb 14 2020. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331004/WHO-2019-nCoV-POEmassgathering-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- **United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019. Mar 3, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>

Risk Assessment Framework: Population attending the event

How many people are expected to attend the event?

High Importance

Public health rationale: The larger the number of participants, the greater the likelihood of a participant being a case of COVID-19. Large numbers of people may also create greater likelihood of crowding and close contact.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Reduce the number of participants or change the venue to prevent crowding

Are participants coming from affected areas where COVID-19 has been detected?

High Importance

Public health rationale: If participants are expected from affected areas, the risk of importation is higher. These travellers may be self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 or self-isolating for 14 days from their arrival in Canada, based on public health advice provided upon entry to Canada.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are participants or event staff/volunteers from demographic groups at greater risk of severe disease, such as older adults or people with underlying medical conditions?

High Importance

Public health rationale: Older adults, people with immune compromising conditions and chronic diseases appear to be at greater risk of severe disease, so consideration should be given to protecting them from possible exposure to COVID-19 cases. Communication about risk to these participants should be emphasized.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are persons attending the event members of critical infrastructure roles, such as healthcare workers?

High Importance

Public health rationale: If transmission occurs at the mass gathering, participants may be subject to self-isolation or may become cases themselves. This could lead to critical infrastructure disruptions/absenteeism if the participants at the event represent critical services and industries.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are participants members of a professional group that might have increased risk of infection?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Healthcare workers may have greater risk of infection and therefore of infecting others due to the possibility of occupational exposure to COVID-19 cases. Participants who work in close contact with international travellers may also have increased risk.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are participants at greater risk of spreading the disease, such as young children?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Young children may be at greater risk of amplifying disease transmission because they are generally less compliant with effective hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices and tend to socialize with others in a way that is likely to increase transmission. Consideration should be given to preventing children from spreading the disease.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are participants from areas where health system resources are limited (e.g. remote and isolated communities)?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Event participants returning to communities with limited health system resources may introduce the virus to communities where there is less capacity to contain and mitigate spread.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Plan for information sharing, risk communication, and emergency communications
- Communicate personal preventive strategies: stay home if ill, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider accessibility of communications (e.g. multiple languages, plain language)
- Develop flexible refund policies for participants to promote staying home when sick
- Consider risk factors of staff/volunteers and reassignment to protect workers
- Plan for staff/volunteer absences

Are all participants registered, with available contact information?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: In the event of an outbreak associated with the event, contact information for the participants may be requested by public health for follow up and contact tracing.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Maintain contact information for participants

Risk Assessment Framework: Local demographics and epidemiology

Is the local community experiencing ongoing transmission of COVID-19?

High Importance

Public health rationale: Local community transmission can put mass gathering participants at risk of infection. In an affected area, other services for participants may be operating at limited capacity (e.g. restaurants, hotels, etc.).

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Involve relevant partners including local public health authorities

Is the local population at increased risk of severe disease if COVID-19 circulated?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Some communities may want to reduce their risk of importation of COVID-19 due to characteristics of the local community, such as a high number of elderly residents, or higher rates of chronic disease.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Involve relevant partners including local public health authorities

Risk Assessment Framework: Event activities

Will participants be participating in activities that promote transmission?

High Importance

Public health rationale: Activities that could contribute to spread: greetings (handshakes, hugs, kisses), singing, cheering, close physical contact such as when participating in contact sports, sharing cups, dishes, utensils, etc.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Offer virtual or live-streamed activities
- Provide packaged refreshments instead of a buffet

Risk Assessment Framework: Crowding

Will participants be consistently within 2 metres of one another?

High Importance

Public health rationale: Respiratory droplets tend to fall within 2 metres of their source, so maintaining a 2 metre distance from others is a precaution to prevent spread.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Change the venue to prevent crowding

Is the event being held indoors, outdoors or both?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Events held outdoors may be lower risk for transmission of respiratory illness than those held indoors due to higher ventilation.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Consider holding events outdoors or increasing ventilation by opening windows and doors (weather permitting)

Will there be restricted points of entrance and exit that force people to be in close proximity and/or pass through high-touch areas (e.g. doors and elevators)?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Crowding and lines at bottlenecks can put participants at increased risk of exposure to respiratory droplets. High-touch surfaces can be contaminated and increase the risk of transmission.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Stagger arrivals and departures
- Enhanced environmental cleaning and pay special attention to high touch surfaces

Risk Assessment Framework: Event duration

How long will participants be gathered at the event?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Longer events present more opportunities for transmission. Consider how overnight accommodations may affect crowding, proximity, and nature and duration of contact.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Shorten events or stagger attendance

Risk Assessment Framework: Event resources

Will hand hygiene stations be available throughout the venue?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Hand hygiene will be performed more frequently if alcohol-based hand sanitizer or hand washing sinks with soap and disposable towels are readily available.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Increase access to hand hygiene stations

Can the event venue(s) be configured to reduce proximity between participants?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Respiratory droplets tend to fall within 2 metres of their source, so maintaining a 2 metre distance from others is a precaution to prevent spread.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Configure the venue to promote a 2 metre distance between participants
- Locate space that can be used to isolate ill participants or workers

Will high-touch surfaces be cleaned and disinfected frequently during the event?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: High-touch surfaces can be contaminated and increase the risk of transmission. SARS-CoV-2 may live on surfaces for a few hours or up to a few days. It can be killed with store-bought disinfectants. (link to environmental cleaning Fact sheet).

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Increase frequency of cleaning of the environment and pay special attention to high touch surfaces. Use a product that cleans and disinfects
- Ensure adequate staffing to maintain prevention strategies such as hand wash stations and regular cleaning and disinfection

Will there be health professionals or first responders at the event to screen and/or attend to someone who may be symptomatic?

Low Importance

Public health rationale: Although screening may not identify all participants with COVID-19, health professionals may be able to quickly identify and isolate symptomatic individuals from other participants. Health care professionals should be familiar with appropriate PPE and IPC measures.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Consider having health care professionals on-site to screen for or attend to people with symptoms
- Ensure that prevention supplies and training for their use are available to staff/volunteers (e.g. personal protective equipment)
- If available, provide disposable medical masks for use if a worker or attendee becomes sick at the event

Risk Assessment Framework: Health system capacity

Does the local health system have the capacity to assess, test and care for persons suspected of COVID-19, potentially in large numbers?

High Importance

Public health rationale: Persons under investigation and cases of COVID-19 could present a substantial burden to the local health system if many require testing and care in a short period of time.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Communicate how to access local health care, including calling ahead to prevent exposure of others in the healthcare setting

Risk Assessment Framework: Geographic location

Is the location of the event geographically remote or in close proximity to a densely populated area?

Medium Importance

Public health rationale: Geographic remoteness might limit access to tertiary care and may make it more difficult for a case to be repatriated. However, proximity to a densely populated area could result in more rapid dissemination of disease.

Risk mitigation strategies:

- Involve relevant partners including local public health authorities and emergency medical services