

# NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVENTS AND PUBLIC GATHERINGS

North Dakota anticipates future community transmission of COVID-19. Community transmission means that illness is spreading between people in the community when it is unclear who might be contagious. While community transmission is not currently in North Dakota, it is critical for all citizens to take personal actions to help mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Events and public gatherings, such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and others create environments where a virus can spread quickly among event workers, participants, and attendees. Depending on the phase of the outbreak in your area, convening organizations may need to modify, postpone, or cancel large events. This guidance includes the information needed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 at large events. These recommendations are provided to help local leaders determine which actions are needed to contain the spread of COVID-19.

## RATIONALE FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING 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 and quarantine of exposed persons), may help reduce virus transmission.

## FOR LOCAL LEADERS, PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS AND TRIBAL NATIONS

First, you must be aware of events happening in your jurisdiction. We recommend reaching out to event organizers with the Threshold 1-3 (TH 1-3) guidance provided below. Please also note, that at any level, health officials at the local, tribal and state

level have the authority to recommend the voluntary cancelation of events or cancel events themselves.

## RISK THRESHOLDS

State agencies, tribal nations, and local public health units are encouraged to regularly visit the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) [novel coronavirus webpage](#) for updates regarding cases in North Dakota. Depending on the level of risk (or threshold), we recommend different strategies for events.

**Low Risk - Threshold 1 (TH1):** Unmitigated or uncontained community transmission is occurring elsewhere but there may not be evidence of significant community transmission in North Dakota yet.

*Recommendation:* Authorities should consider initiating minimally restrictive, or burdensome, but effective mitigation measures. Additionally, authorities should consider canceling or postponing events where a substantive number of attendees are from high risk locations, or attendees are from high risk populations.

**Moderate risk - Threshold 2 (TH2):** There is evidence that unmitigated or uncontained community transmission of the disease is occurring in at least one geographic jurisdiction within the state.

*Recommendation:* Authorities should consider canceling or rescheduling events if located within the area that has community transmission of the disease or if a large number of attendees are anticipated to come from these impacted areas. Consider alternative attendance options such as web-based, televised only or remote attendance.

**High Risk - Threshold 3 (TH3):** Widespread community transmission of disease within North Dakota.

*Recommendation:* Authorities should cancel or postpone all events that involve the potential for disease transmission and cannot accommodate alternative attendance options.

Authorities with questions regarding TH1-3 should contact the North Dakota Department of Health.

# COVID-19 MASS GATHERING GUIDANCE: LOW RISK-THRESHOLD 1

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

**Authorities should consider initiating minimally restrictive, or burdensome, but effective mitigation measures. Additionally, authorities should consider canceling or postponing events where a substantive number of attendees are from high risk locations.**

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:
  - a. Prop doors open to avoid touching (May need to consider additional security.)
  - b. Increase ventilation within the facility
  - c. Increase the number of hygiene stations, including hand sanitizer stations
6. Connect with your [local public health unit](#) 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.

**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.). See [guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### Communicate with attendees prior to the event.

- Provide a brief description of the current status of COVID-19 in your area. (See [NDDoH novel coronavirus website](#) 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:
  - 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 6 or more feet away from people.
  - 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.

## 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. See [guidance](#) from the CDC.
- 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.
- Post signs sharing how attendees can protect themselves and others at your venue. Consider posting signs at entrances and in bathrooms. Sample signage is available on [CDC’s website](#).
- If there is a substantive number of attendees from high risk locations, consider canceling, postponing or consider alternative attendance options such as web-based, televised only or remote attendance.

# COVID-19 MASS GATHERING GUIDANCE: MODERATE RISK-THRESHOLD 2

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.**

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 state, tribal, or local health authorities 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 unit](#) 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 public health unit](#) 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. See [guidance](#) from the CDC.

### Communicate with attendees prior to the event.

- Provide a brief description of the current status of COVID-19 in your area. (See [NDDoH novel coronavirus website](#) 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 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:
  - 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 6 or more feet away from people.
  - 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.

### 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 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. See [guidance](#) from the CDC.
- 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. Sample signage is available on [CDC's website](#).

## COVID-19 MASS GATHERING GUIDANCE: HIGH RISK-THRESHOLD 3

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.

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.

## JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITY AND KEY DECISION MAKERS

### Local

#### Key Decision Makers:

North Dakota Century Code 23-35-08. Boards of health - Powers and duties. Except when in conflict with a local ordinance or a civil service rule within a board of health's jurisdiction, or a tribal code, ordinance, or policy, each board of health:

5. May make rules regarding any nuisance, source of filth, and any cause of sickness which are necessary for public health and safety.

#### 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.

### State

#### Key Decision Makers:

North Dakota Century Code 23-01-05: Health officer - Qualifications, salary, term, duties - Advisory committee.

Issue any orders relating to disease control measures deemed necessary to prevent the spread of communicable disease. Disease control measures may include special immunization activities and decontamination measures. Written orders issued under this section shall have the same effect as a physician's standing medical order. The state health officer may apply to the district court in a judicial district where a communicable disease is present for an injunction canceling public events or closing places of business. On application of the state health officer showing the necessity of such cancellation, the court may issue an ex parte preliminary injunction, pending a full hearing.

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

## 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.

### 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.

### Health Care 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 local public health units 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.