

Preparing Your Event for Coronavirus

The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated the recent coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) a global public health emergency. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), coronaviruses are common in animal species. Although most don't affect humans, the most recent strain, COVID-19, does and can easily spread from person to person.

Coronaviruses typically cause mild upper respiratory tract illnesses, and those affected exhibit cold-like symptoms (e.g., headache, cough, fever, sore throat and runny nose). Some coronaviruses, like COVID-19, can be more severe, and individuals may experience lower-respiratory tract illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia. For the elderly, infants and those with weakened immune systems, COVID-19 can be deadly.

Because COVID-19 is highly contagious and potentially life-threatening, it's critical that organizations take the proper precautions to protect individuals. This is especially true for businesses that plan on hosting large events where just one misstep can lead to the quick spread of COVID-19 among attendees. This Risk Insights highlights guidance from the CDC regarding preparing your event for coronavirus.

Review Emergency Operation Plans

The first step for preparing your event for COVID-19 involves reviewing your emergency operations plan. To accomplish this, consider doing the following:

- **Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team at your**

venue. Discuss the emergency operations plan and determine how it may impact aspects of your event, such as personnel, security, services, activities, functions and resources. Develop a contingency plan that addresses various scenarios described in this guidance.

- **Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.** When forming key relationships for your event, include relevant partners, such as the local public health department, community leaders, faith-based organizations, vendors, suppliers, hospitals, hotels, airlines, transportation companies and law enforcement officials. Collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts. When doing so, clearly identify each partner's role, responsibilities and decision-making authority. You should also contact your local public health department for a copy of their outbreak response and mitigation plan for your community and participate in communitywide emergency preparedness activities.

Address Prevention Strategies in Your Emergency Operations Plan

The second step for preparing your event for COVID-19 involves addressing prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan. To accomplish this, consider doing the following:

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- **Promote preventive actions.** Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources—such as your local public health department or the CDC—to encourage your event staff and participants to practice good personal health habits. Promote everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, recommending that individuals:
 - Stay home when they are sick, except to get medical care.
 - Cover their mouth with a tissue when they cough and sneeze.
 - Wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing.
 - Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
- **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your event.** Plan to have extra supplies on hand for event staff and participants, including hand-washing stations equipped with soap, hand sanitizer, tissues and disposable face masks for individuals who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- **Plan for staff absences.** Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Event staff needs to stay home when they are sick or if they have to care for a sick household. As such, it's important to identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
- **Promote messages that discourage people who are sick from attending events.** This should include messages requesting that people leave events if they begin to have symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, cough and shortness of breath. They should seek medical advice promptly by calling ahead to a doctor's office or emergency room.
- **Identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event.** Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately. Work with partners, such as local hospitals, to create a plan for treating staff and participants who do not live nearby. Include a plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations.
- **Plan ways to limit in-person contact for staff supporting your event.** There are several ways to do this, including offering staff the option to work remotely if they can perform their job duties off-site. Reduce the number of staff needed by staggering shifts for staff who support essential functions and services during events.
- **Develop flexible refund policies for participants.** Create refund policies that allow participants to stay home when they are sick, need to care for sick household members or are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.
- **Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel events.** Work closely with local public health officials to assess local capacities in the area. During a COVID-19 outbreak, resource limitations among local health care systems or law enforcement can influence the decision to postpone or cancel your event. If possible, plan alternative ways for participants to enjoy the event (e.g., television, radio or digital broadcasts).

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Communicate COVID-19 to Guests and Event Staff

The third step for preparing your event for COVID-19 involves creating a communication plan to keep guests informed. To accomplish this, consider doing the following:

- **Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information.** Identify everyone in your chain of communication (e.g., event staff, participants, suppliers, vendors and key community partners) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication. You should also identify platforms, such as phone hotlines, automated text messaging systems or websites, to help disseminate information.
- **Identify and address potential language, cultural and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants.** Above all, information you share should be easily understood by everyone attending the event.

Stay Informed

Despite the current low level of risk for the average American employee, it is important to understand that the COVID-19 situation evolves and changes every day. Employers should closely monitor the [CDC](#) and [WHO](#) websites for the latest and most accurate information on COVID-19.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention