

**Health Protection:**

**Central Coast** Tel 604-983-6700, Fax 604-983-6839  
**North Vancouver** Tel 604-983-6700, Fax 604-983-6702  
**Powell River** Tel 604-485-3310, Fax 604-485-3305  
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**Sechelt** Tel 1604-885-5164, Fax 1604-885-9725  
**Squamish** Tel 604-892-2293, Fax 604-892-2327  
**Vancouver** Tel 604-675-3800, Fax 604-736-8651

## **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information for Organizers of Mass Gatherings**

### **What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and how does it spread?**

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a newly identified virus. The infection has symptoms similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold: cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing. Severe illness can occur in some people. COVID-19 is transmitted by droplets when a person coughs or sneezes in close contact with another person, or onto surfaces which are later touched by another. The virus can be spread by touch if a person has used their hands to cover their mouth or nose when they cough. The virus causing COVID-19 is not known to become airborne, and does not pass through the skin.

### **Why are mass gatherings important in the context of COVID-19?**

Large events such as conferences, festivals, concerts, religious services, and sporting events bring together groups of people and may increase transmission of respiratory infections. *Event organizers play an important role in minimizing the possibility of transmission for COVID-19, as well as other respiratory infections.*

### **Should I cancel my event?**

Cancellation of large gatherings is not recommended in Vancouver Coastal Health at this time due to very low rates of community transmission and low case counts of COVID-19. The large majority of transmission has occurred in household environments, with limited transmission through community contact.

### **How do I minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission at my event?**

To reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission, the following measures are recommended:

#### ***During the event, organizers should encourage and support attendees to:***

- Stay home if they are ill.
  - *Organizers can offer refunds, re-ticketing and remote viewing options (e.g. online attendance, TV) to encourage and support people who are ill in their decision to not attend the event.*
- Clean their hands frequently and adequately (with hand sanitizer or with warm running water and soap), especially after using the washroom and before interactions with others.
  - *Organizers can provide hand sanitizer and handwashing stations at entrances and in prominent locations at the venue.*
- Cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing (e.g. cough into their arm to avoid touching their face), and avoiding touching the face.
  - *Reminders of good cough hygiene (“cover your cough”) can be provided in event communications including announcements and online messages*
- Avoid close proximity and contact with others
  - *Organizers can discourage physical contact and crowding (e.g. by encouraging people not to shake hands, not to dance closely together, etc).*
  - *Organizers should not provide or encourage shared sleeping accommodations.*
- Avoid sharing food or drinks with others.
  - *Organizers can eliminate self-serve buffet style eating, and instead offer separate individual servings (e.g. bagged lunches, separate serving plates).*

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**Before the event, organizers should:**

- Plan to frequently and thoroughly clean high-touch areas (such as door knobs, payment card touch pads and elevator buttons) with regular disinfectant cleaning products. Mixing 15 mL (1 tablespoon) of household bleach per 1 litre of water will form an effective disinfectant solution. Use of specialized disinfection products is **not** necessary.
- Establish modes for online or other remote participation/viewing if possible.
- Consider ways to limit crowding, such as switching to an outdoor or larger venue, or dividing the event into smaller groups.
- Stagger times for arrivals and departures to prevent crowding and congested areas.
- Plan processes to rapidly communicate new information with attendees if necessary.
- Meet with the venue's operations manager to learn about your venue, local resources and how to set up an isolation area for people who may become ill during the event.
  - Establish arrangements to safely isolate people who become ill during an event (with masks in a separate space), and support them in seeking health care by contacting a clinic before arrival to ensure proper protection is in place. A simple "procedure mask" is appropriate to prevent droplet transmission; an "N95" respirator is not necessary.
- Be prepared to respond to updates in public health recommendations. Identify plans in case you are notified by health authorities to postpone or cancel your event.
  - *Set up a contingency plan (Plan B) and update your communications contacts list for the attendees so that you can provide up-to-date information if needed.*

**Should I provide masks to attendees?**

Based on current public health evidence, it is **not** recommended that event participants without symptoms wear masks during large gatherings.

**Is there anything special I should do if my event includes older adults, people with lung disease, heart-disease, diabetes, or immune-compromised individuals?**

These are all risk factors for severe illness due to COVID-19, so it is particularly important to follow the above guidance. Consider the distance and transportation options from your event to healthcare services, particularly for long events in remote locations.

**Are children's events a concern for COVID-19?**

Children have more frequent hand-to-face contact, and they generally have greater exposure to respiratory viruses than adults. However, current evidence suggests that children have lower rates of COVID-19 than adults, and are less likely to experience severe disease. Measures to limit infection transmission are always recommended for events including children.

**Where can I learn more?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada has developed a risk assessment tool to support event organizers in identifying and mitigating risks at large gatherings: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>.

Information developed by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) for the public on COVID-19, including how to isolate and seek medical attention for COVID-19, is available at [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel)).

**Further questions?** To discuss prevention of COVID-19 transmission during your event, contact [EHVC@vch.ca](mailto:EHVC@vch.ca).