

Guidelines on Social Interactions in Community spread of COVID-19

COVID-19 has been leaving a mark on the world, with a great toll on health, economies, and society in general. Consistent and proportionate use of a variety of public health measures have helped to control the pandemic. The drive for vaccination with booster doses along with the non-pharmaceutical measures were crucial to control and retain a stable situation and decrease the burden on acute hospitalisations, ITU admissions and COVID-related deaths.

The following guidelines respond to the need to continue to provide guidance to the public on social interactions in the current situation with continued community spread of COVID-19.

These guidelines provide for the continued safe operation of health care services, economic, educational, and social activities, workplaces and offices, gatherings and events, leisure and entertainment, and personal care activities in the current scenario and also protect our communities against other respiratory infections.

How is coronavirus spread?

Coronavirus (SARS CoV2) is spread through droplet infection by means of close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your nose, eyes, or mouth without washing or sanitizing your hands. The potential for becoming infected is a factor of the number of viral particles that one may have become exposed and how long one was exposed to the infective particles and the immunity of the person.

Attending activities – a personal decision

One needs to make personal decisions about their risk for COVID-19 based on guidance issued by the public health authorities. At this stage of the pandemic, risk can be individualized. You will need to make your own assessment regarding whether you attend an activity. Several economic, educational, and social activities, commitments at workplaces or offices, and personal and healthcare activities are essential and important to you. Any risk assessment needs to take



into consideration various issues including your assessment of risk based on the type of activity as outlined in these guidelines, your specific vulnerabilities including age, medical conditions that put you at higher risk of complications, the potential of contracting and transmitting the virus to others and how vulnerable those who live with you / spend time with you, are.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is highly effective at protecting from severe COVID-19 infection requiring hospitalization or resulting in death. However, (as for all vaccines) since efficacy is not 100%, vaccination cannot provide a guarantee that an individual is fully protected from COVID-19.

Precautions to prevent respiratory infections should be taken by everyone. However, it is essential that individuals who are of an older age and/or are medically vulnerable, especially those who have weakened immune systems due to medical conditions, treatments, or medications they are taking, should continue to take precautions to minimise their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

What are the social protection factors which need to be adopted to prevent one from contracting coronavirus and from unknowingly spreading it to others?

- ✓ Risk is cumulative - the larger the number of persons from different households who attend the activity, the larger the risk
- ✓ Assess risk for any activity, considering risks to yourself and your loved ones
- ✓ Stay home and do not attend activities if you are unwell
- ✓ Get tested if you have any symptoms linked to coronavirus or have been in close contact with someone who is positive
- ✓ Keep away from persons who appear ill
- ✓ Always keep a physical distance from others especially when indoors
- ✓ Wear your mask correctly covering your nose, mouth, and chin in accordance with national legislation, and whenever you feel unsafe
- ✓ Avoid crowded areas particularly those indoors
- ✓ Ensure adequate ventilation in areas where you meet others
- ✓ Keep your hands clean and carry hand sanitizer when you are outdoors
- ✓ Stay up to date with the COVID-19 vaccination as recommended by the health authorities and encourage others to do the same
- ✓ If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, ensure you follow the advice provided by the Public Health Authorities



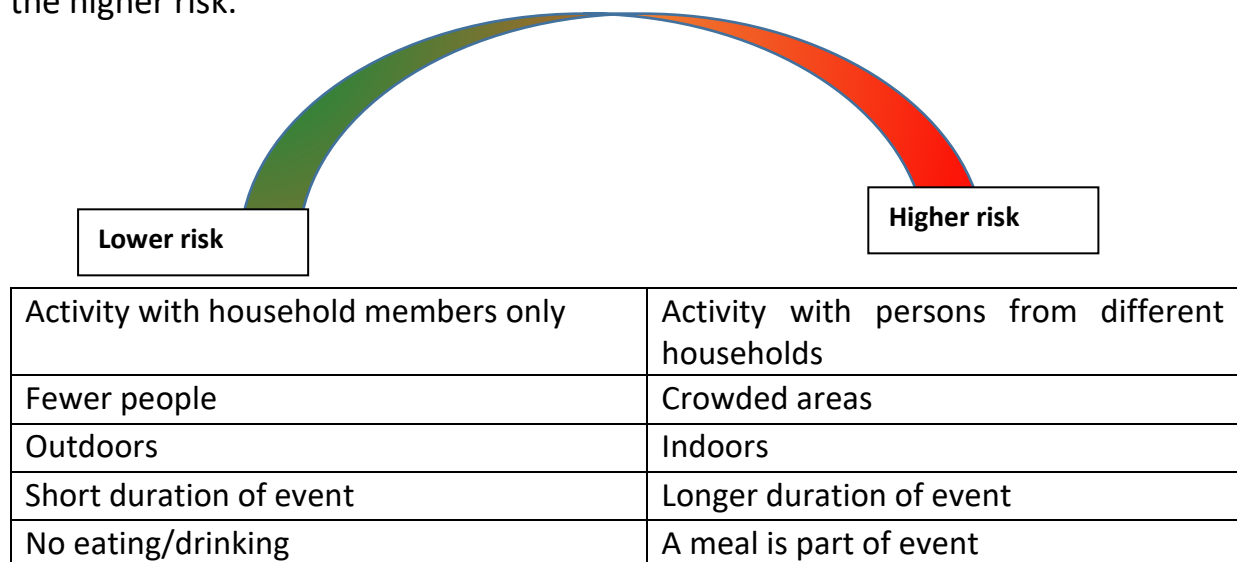
What is a safe environment to limit spread of COVID-19?

Activities with household members only present the lowest risk. Your household includes and comprises those persons who share your living space, sleep in the same house with you, those you generally share meals with and possibly also share bathrooms with.

When mixing with other persons outside of your household, it is important to assess your own vulnerability and risk and, if necessary or appropriate, limit your personal social interactions to levels where you feel comfortable and safe.

Safety in the ‘social bubble’ concept depends on the shared responsibility and level of adherence to social protection factors by the different members of that social bubble. The ‘social bubble’ concept can be applied to economic, educational, and social activities, workplaces and offices, gatherings and events, leisure and entertainment, and personal care activities.

Advice regarding an assessment of risk for any activity that one decides to host or partake in is still relevant. **Risk is cumulative** thus the more persons from different households one encounters and the longer one spends in any activity, the higher risk.



The following precautions will help minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission when attending activities

- Wear a mask in accordance with national legislation and whenever / wherever you feel unsafe
- Minimise physical contact with others to greet them



- Opt for outdoor activities where possible, otherwise ensure adequate ventilation of indoor premises
- Avoid overcrowding
- Ensure regular sanitizing stations around the premises
- Avoid crowding in restrooms
- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of the premises
- If there are surfaces which will be touched frequently, ensure cleaning also takes place periodically
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- It's especially important to wash your hands:
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - Before touching your face
 - After using the restroom
 - After leaving a public place
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After handling your mask
 - After changing a diaper
 - After caring for someone sick
 - After touching animals or pets
- If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes**
 - **If you are wearing a mask:** You can cough or sneeze into your mask. Put on a new, clean mask as soon as possible and wash your hands.
 - **If you are not wearing a mask:**
 - Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or alternatively use the inside of your elbow and do not spit.
 - Throw used tissues in the trash.
 - Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Precautions when travelling

If you are making travel plans, choose destinations with least risk, avoid gatherings, wear a mask if you feel unsafe and consider these questions:

- **Have you been vaccinated against COVID-19?** If you haven't, get vaccinated. Since the basic vaccine schedule requires two doses, wait two weeks after getting your second vaccine dose to travel. It takes time for your body to build protection after any vaccination.
- **Have you had any booster doses?** Having all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses, including boosters, increases your protection from serious illness.
- **Are you at increased risk for severe illness?** Anyone can get COVID-19. But older adults and persons of any age with certain medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- **Do you live with someone who is at increased risk for severe illness?** If you get infected while travelling, you can spread the COVID-19 virus to the people you live with when you return, even if you don't have symptoms.
- **Does your home or destination have requirements or restrictions for travellers?** Even if you have had all recommended vaccine doses, you must follow local, and destination travel rules.

General health advice

- Take care of your health – do regular exercise and eat nutritious food
- Do not miss any scheduled medical appointments
- Take any prescribed medications regularly and as prescribed
- Find time to relax and enjoy your pastimes
- Find ways to manage your emotions
- Get enough good sleep
- Seek help when you need