

COVID-19 Transitioning - Standards for Gatherings and Events

Introduction and definitions

The following standards are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta.

A gathering is a planned or spontaneous event which may take place indoors or outdoors. The number of participants can vary from a small number of persons to several hundreds or thousands in attendance. Gatherings come in many forms such as community events, concerts, festivals, conferences, exhibitions, parades, processions, weddings, parties or sporting events.

Mass events are large-scale gatherings that involve a significant number of people coming together at a specific location. For the purposes of these standards, the WHO definitions on mass events have been adopted:

An event counts as a 'mass gathering' if the number of people it brings together is so large that it has the potential to strain the planning and response resources of the health system in the community where it takes place.

If the event takes place over several days in a small island state where the capacity of the health system is quite limited, then even an event with just a few hundred participants could place a big strain on the health system and then be considered a 'mass gathering' event.

Statement

In the context of the COVID-19 transition phase, gatherings and mass events present a risk of increasing the transmission rate of the virus in view of the potential for close contact between many persons for an extended time period. The more people an individual interacts with at a gathering or mass event and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential of becoming infected with COVID-19 and of COVID-19 spreading. Higher levels of community transmission at the time of the event and in the area that the gathering is being held can result in a higher potential for COVID-19 spread during the gathering. In this context, large events have a particularly substantial impact on the health system capacity and resources if they result in a significant number of new COVID-19 cases.

For this reason, the Superintendence of Public Health reiterates its position that it is not in favour of the organisation of mass gatherings or events. Nonetheless, these standards have been issued to mitigate against the transmission of COVID-19 in events and gatherings as defined within this document.

Risk classification of mass events

Building on the Centre for Disease Control's classification (2020)¹, the likelihood of COVID-19 spreading at events and gatherings increases as follows:

- **Low:** Events held online/virtually with no in-person contact
- **Medium:** Smaller outdoor and face-to-face gatherings in which individuals from different households but who have not travelled abroad in the 14 days prior to the event can observe physical distancing and remain spaced at least 2 metres apart, wear masks/visors and do not share objects.
- **High:** Medium-sized face-to-face gatherings that can be adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 2 metres apart and with attendees who have travelled abroad in the previous 14 days.
- **Extremely High:** Large face-to-face gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 2 metres apart and attendees can also include persons who have travelled abroad in the previous 14 days.

Another aspect that determines the level of risk for mass events is the proportion of attendees that are more likely to develop serious complications if they were to contract a COVID-19 infection. Transmission of COVID-19 at an event where a greater proportion of attendees are elderly or persons classified as vulnerable due to underlying conditions or low immunity, is likely to have greater impact on the healthcare system due to increased hospitalisation of these individuals.

Spontaneous mass events should be avoided in the current scenario, as they do not allow for adequate planning and preparation to put the necessary mitigation standards for COVID-19 in place.

As COVID-19 restrictions are gradually relaxed, organisers of gatherings and mass events, their staff/volunteers and contractors must work together to adapt and promote safe events consistent with advice from public health authorities. Employers/organisers, staff/volunteers and attendees must act responsibly to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 during the event. In the eventuality that a positive COVID-19 case/s is linked to attendance of a mass event, organisers must be ready to respond and collaborate immediately and appropriately to specific demands and recommendations from the public health authorities.

These guidelines provide considerations that event organisers must take into account when deciding on control standards such as restrictions within venues to allow for physical distancing, the adequacy of facilities for proper personal and public hygiene, cleaning arrangements, and other changes that may affect the health and safety of workers,

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

volunteers and attendees. The guidelines below outline general principles that are applicable to all events as well as outlining additional standards required for larger-scale events.

For the rest of this document, the terms 'organisers' and 'staff' will be used to refer to combinations of employers/organisers, staff/workers or volunteers involved in the planning and conduction of a mass event.

This guidance document classifies events into two major groups of events with:

- A. less than 100 potential attendees - organisers should follow the sections of the document designated for 'Organisers of ALL gatherings and events' that can be found under each sub-heading of the guidance.**
- B. more than 100 potential attendees - organisers shall carry out a risk assessment and have this assessment available for perusal by the competent authorities. Additionally, the risk assessment is a prerequisite when submitting the application that is required for a mass event permit to be issued by the police force and MTA.**

Standards to be observed during mass gatherings and events

A. Organisers of ALL mass gatherings and events shall:

1. consider whether event can be hosted partially or fully online/remotely
2. consider whether event can be hosted outdoors instead of indoors
3. ensure that the venue chosen for the event has the capacity to accommodate the planned number of attendees, to include physical distancing considerations (see section below regarding determining premises capacity)
4. communicate messages to prospective attendees regarding necessary public health standards prior to the event
5. exercise the right of refusal of entry to the event of attendees that are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms
6. provide adequate and easily accessible hand sanitisers with an appropriate 70% alcohol content at the entrance to the event and in other suitable locations, and require all persons to sanitise their hands prior to entrance
7. regulate entrance into and exit from the area where the event is taking place, adopting appropriate crowd management techniques as necessary
8. ensure that the maximum number of attendees at any one time is **one person (patrons and staff) per 4 square metres** of the total area being utilised, excluding any areas not accessible to patrons, and excluding car parks.
9. keep records of the contact information (name and a phone number) of at least one person per group/household/party attending for 28 days after the event to enable contact tracing
10. minimise the duration of the event as far as practicable, particularly in the case of events taking place in closed/indoor spaces

11. except in the case of families with children and people from the same household, no more than 10 persons should be allowed to sit /stand together in a group
12. ensure that each group of attendees maintains physical distancing of at least 2m from other groups
13. ensure there are adequate and accessible facilities to achieve good hygiene and frequent handwashing, and that facilities are equipped with adequate amounts of disposable hand wipes, soap and sanitizers, and are in good working order, accessible, clean and safe
14. review tasks and processes that usually require close physical interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between staff and between staff and attendees
15. ensure that organisers and staff wear masks or visors during the event in cases where they may need to remain in close contact with each other for prolonged periods in a closed indoor space (e.g. in a kitchen) or where maintaining a 2-metre distance is not possible
16. provide thorough cleaning and disinfection operations of all the common areas inside the premises, targeting high-touch surfaces for frequent disinfection, also if the venue is outdoors
17. ensure that bar, restaurant or café facilities operating at the event venue do so within the respective applicable guidelines
18. performers and crew are subject to the same requirements regarding hygiene and other COVID-19 related precautions as other event staff, except that performers are not required to wear masks/visors during their performance
19. the organisers must take out adequate insurance to cover the event, in proportion to the type and size of the event and the level of risk

B. Additionally, organisers of events with more than 100 potential attendees shall

Carry out a thorough risk assessment. The Risk Assessment Submissions will need to include information applicable with respect to standards (1) to (19) and all the additional mitigation standards that the organisers are planning to take.

The Risk Assessment needs to be presented upon application to the Malta Tourism Authority and the Public Health authorities. Furthermore, this risk assessment needs to be submitted together with the application for a police permit.

If appropriate mitigation standards cannot be implemented to mitigate the risk of spread to acceptable levels, the application for the proposed mass event may be rejected.

In addition, the following apply:

20. Attendees should be subjected to temperature checks at the entrance for the presence of fever (persons with a temperature of 37.2° Celsius or higher should be denied entrance)

21. visible markings outside and inside the entrance to the event should indicate two (2) metre distances that attendees shall respect whilst queuing, including queuing for restrooms
22. visible signage should be affixed at the entrance to the event indicating the maximum capacity of attendees that can be present at the event at any one time, and organisers must keep track of the number of persons present at the event to ensure that the capacity of the premises is not exceeded
23. visual reminders should be displayed to attendees throughout the venue and announcements broadcast on available public address systems regarding preventive standards they are expected to follow to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and actions to be taken if an attendee develops symptoms
24. messages for inclusion in information disseminated to potential attendees prior to the event should be prepared advising individuals with higher risk of transmitting COVID-19 not to attend the event (e.g. symptomatic individuals, those with close contact with known cases of COVID-19, individuals under quarantine, those having recently travelled from countries with high rates of community transmission of COVID-19)
25. messages for inclusion in information disseminated to potential attendees prior to the event should be prepared advising individuals in the high-risk groups of developing serious complications from COVID-19 infection or who are in contact with such persons not to attend the event (unless special arrangements have been made for them)
26. protocols should be in place for the isolation of suspected cases, including a designated isolation area. Organisers should liaise with health authorities regarding action to be taken if suspected cases are identified during the event

Prior to the event

Standards applicable to all events:

Standards that decrease points of contact between staff and patrons including digital tickets and online booking and purchase of tickets, should be encouraged as much as possible. Online and/or contactless payments should also be encouraged. Self-scanning of tickets by customers can eliminate another point of contact between patrons and staff.

Determining the venue capacity for events

Standards applicable to all events:

Event organisers shall ensure that in the area/venue where the event is being held the number of persons, including staff or volunteers is not more than **1 person per 4 square metres of available space for the patrons**, excluding any area not accessible to patrons, and excluding car parks.

To achieve this 4 square metre 'rule':

- i. calculate the area of the venue/space being used (e.g. length of venue in metres x width of venue in metres = area of premises in square metres)

- ii. divide the area of the premises by 4
- iii. the answer of that division (ignoring any remainder) is the maximum capacity that the venue can hold at any one time.

By way of example, if the venue/space is 2350 square metres in size, $2350 \div 4 = 587.5$, ignoring the remainder of 0.5, the organiser should allow only 587 attendees at any time in the area/venue, including staff. For larger venues the value of the areas of separate sections of the venue should be summed up to calculate the total area. Only usable areas of the venue/area that can be accessed by attendees should be included when calculating venue/area capacity. Area pertaining to sections of the premises such as storage areas, staff-only areas and backstage areas (where applicable) should not be included.

Once premises capacity is reached event organisers should not allow further prospective attendees entry to the event.

Physical (social) distancing

For attendees: Standards applicable to all events:

Social distancing refers to the requirement that people physically distance themselves from others. Event attendees must keep at least **2 metres from others** and with the exception of families with children or people from the same household, no more than 10 persons should be allowed to sit /stand together in a group. Event organisers need to adapt their event and the venue being utilised to allow for appropriate physical distancing, avoid crowding and ensure that each group of attendees maintains physical distancing of at least 2m from other groups

Organisers should also review tasks and processes that usually require close physical interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between staff members and between staff and attendees (e.g. payment counters in bars) as well as decrease the need for queuing.

With respect to any seating areas that may be utilised during organised events, for seating that is not physically distanced (e.g. seating fixed in place or fixed to adjoining seats) organisers should ensure that seating patterns allow 2m between groups of attendees who have attended the event together. In the case of movable seating that can be spaced out as necessary, this should be laid out in such a way as to respect the 2m distancing requirement. If the event has allocated seating, these restrictions should be kept in mind when seats are being booked. For events with theatre-style seating, organisers may wish to employ techniques such as use of a checkerboard pattern or blocking off certain rows to help achieve the required distancing or employ software solutions that allow dynamic seat selection that respects distancing requirements at the booking stage.

Any play areas within the venue should follow the standards for children's playing fields published on <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid->

[19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance For Entities Responsible For Outdoor Children Playing Fields.pdf](#)

For staff: Standards applicable to all events:

Working in close contact increases the risk of staff being exposed to COVID-19. Event organisers should undertake a risk assessment to determine what control standards are reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimise health and safety risks from COVID-19 to their staff. For example, if close contact with others is unavoidable, the following standards can apply:

- minimising the number of people within an area at any time
- staggering start, finish and break times where appropriate
- moving work tasks to different areas of the venue/event area or off-site if possible
- if possible, it is recommended that staff are divided in set work teams. These teams are to work different rosters and physical contact between members of different teams is to be restricted even during resting times, off days and change of shifts. This will ensure that if one team is required to quarantine (e.g. if a team-member is infected with COVID-19) this does not result in many other workers needing to be on quarantine too.
- if handover is required, consider using digital means so that staff do not need to physically congregate in the same place.
- requiring staff to use methods such as mobile phones to communicate rather than face-to-face interaction
- ensuring each staff member has their own equipment or tools where possible
- ensuring staff do not attend the event if they are experiencing potential symptoms of COVID-19
- staff members that may be within the high-risk group of developing serious complications if they contract COVID-19 should be offered options that limit their exposure, for example setting up for the event rather than working at the registration desk.

For events with greater than 100 potential attendees:

- Use physical barriers, such as clear acrylic or tempered glass screens at points of interaction between staff and attendees (such as ticket booths and ticket scanning areas)

Personal protective equipment for staff

Standards applicable to all events:

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is recommended when staff, despite other control standards, require to be in close contact with each other or with other people for longer than the recommended time (i.e. more than 15 minutes face-to-face cumulative over one day or more than 2 hours in a shared closed space). Staff must be trained in the proper use of PPE. Be aware of risks that may arise as a result of staff using and wearing PPE inappropriately.

The type of PPE to be provided will depend on the event venue and the outcomes of risk assessment. Common PPE that can be used to protect against COVID-19 include masks, visors, gloves, eye protection, and screens. Eye protection, in the form of safety glasses, goggles or a face shield, can be used as PPE for protecting against the risks of COVID-19. Eye protection can assist to act as a physical barrier from droplet spray and prevent unintentional rubbing of eyes between hand washing. Eye protection may be necessary for workers who are in close

proximity to droplet spray. For many events, eye protection will not be a required control measure. Good hygiene practices should be followed if eye protection is used.

Staff should wear a mask or visor in situations where they may need to have close contact with each other to perform certain tasks or will spend time in circumstances where maintaining physical distancing is more difficult, particularly if the event is being held indoors.

It is the responsibility of the organisers to provide appropriate masks or visors to their workers/volunteers. Organisers must also provide appropriate training and instruction on how to put on and fit, wear, remove and dispose of masks and on how to put on, remove and sanitise visors. They must also provide suitable facilities to dispose of masks appropriately. Information about using masks or visors is provided by the manufacturer.

Gloves will not normally be necessary for most tasks during many events, apart from staff handling food and beverages (see below), handling/disposing of garbage and for cleaning (see below). If organisers choose to supply or use gloves, they should make sure the gloves are suitable for the intended tasks.

Personal protective equipment for attendees

Standards applicable to all events:

Attendees are to be advised to wear a mask or visor where it may be difficult to maintain physical distancing throughout the event, where attendees spend a prolonged period of time (two hours or more) in a closed indoor space and where they feel safer if they wear a mask / visor. Additionally, attendees should be made aware of increased risks when event participants are likely to raise their voice (e.g. shouting, chanting or singing).

Hygiene facilities and ventilation

Standards applicable to all events:

Organisers must ensure there are adequate and accessible facilities to achieve good hygiene and that facilities are equipped with disposable hand wipes, soap and sanitizers, are in good working order, clean and safe. The venue should be thoroughly cleaned several times each day (see further details in section on 'Cleaning and Disinfection' below). Open receptacles should be made available for disposal of waste.

Bathroom doors and windows should be kept open to allow for better ventilation. Hand dryers should not be used as these can potentially disperse viral particles into the air. If portable toilets are being provided, also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked throughout the duration of the event. Hand sanitiser stations should also be provided and where possible these should be touch-free.

In the case of indoor venues, the public health standards at https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance_Air-conditioning-and-ventilation-systems_23Jun20.pdf are to be followed. Action required depends on the type of

air-conditioning and ventilation systems operating at the venue. Air-conditioning filters should be checked prior to the event and cleaned regularly and as necessary. Proper replacement rate of indoor air should be ascertained. In indoor venues, doors and windows must be kept open to improve ventilation.

For events with greater than 100 potential attendees:

The number of people who can use the restroom at any one time should be managed to ensure physical distancing can be maintained in queues, and such as by scheduling longer and more frequent intermission times and by providing more sanitary facilities.

Serving of food and refreshments

Standards applicable to all events:

Any bar, restaurant or café facilities operating at the event venue should do so within the respective applicable guidelines. Physical distancing should be maintained in queues, and hygiene precautions are to be followed when selling/serving refreshments. These include:

- No communal food and beverage service or self-service items are allowed. Attendees are not to be allowed to serve themselves or help themselves to items such as straws, stirrers or condiments from a container that can be touched by all attendees. Instead they should have such items handed to them by staff/volunteers.
- Shared finger foods are not allowed - each attendee should be provided with their own separate portion.
- For events where refreshments are available for purchase, contactless payment or, if not possible, exact payment is preferable. The same member of staff who handles food and beverage items should ideally not be responsible for handling cash from attendees, or, if such an arrangement is not feasible, should ensure that they sanitise their hands with soap and water or alcohol hand rub after each instance of handling cash.
- Any staff handling food/beverage items should adhere to strict hygiene principles. These include frequent hand washing and use of gloves when handling such items, or, where possible, use of an implement (such as tongs) to eliminate direct contact with the items being served to attendees. Any staff required to use gloves is advised to consult the advice on handwashing and the use of gloves published by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate to ensure that gloves are used in an appropriate and hygienic manner (visit www.covid19health.gov.mt for more guidance)
- Bins should be available for attendees to be able to safely dispose of any waste.
- If vending machines are available at the event venue, hand sanitiser should be easily available beside the vending machine, with signage affixed to the vending machine indicating that users should sanitise their hands before and after using the vending machine. Vending machines should be included in the list of high-touch surfaces prioritised for frequent cleaning (see section on 'Cleaning and Disinfection' below).

Deliveries, contractors and transport

Standards applicable to all events:

Minimise the number of staff attending to deliveries and contractors as much as possible. Delivery drivers and other contractors who need to provide maintenance or repair services or perform other essential activities, should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are on site. Ensure hand washing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is readily available for workers/volunteers after handling deliveries.

When transport vehicles such as coaches or minivans are used for the event, the public health guidelines at <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance Document For Passengers And Transport Service Providers.pdf> are to be followed.

Considerations for performers and crew

Standards applicable to all events:

In the case of events that involve performers and/or crew, physical distancing should be practiced, and physical contact avoided as much as possible. Minimum possible numbers of cast and crew should be allowed. Performers and crew are subject to the same requirements regarding hygiene and other COVID-19 related precautions as other staff excepting that performers are not required to wear masks/visors during a performance.

Please refer to published guidelines for Indoor Cinemas and Theatre for further standards regarding standards relevant to events involving performances on <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Obligatory Conditions And Guidelines For Indoor Cinemas And Theatres.pdf>

Cleaning and disinfecting standards

Standards applicable to all events:

A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. The venue/area must be cleaned at least daily in the case of events that are spread over several days. In the case of events that last less than one day, thorough cleaning and disinfection should take place before and after the event at a minimum. High-touch surfaces should be targeted for more frequent disinfection as described below.

Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient. Once clean, surfaces can be disinfected. When and how often the premises should be disinfected will depend on the likelihood of contamination. Alternatively, cleaners may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.

How to clean and disinfect

Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively moving towards the dirtiest surface to avoid spreading dirt to cleaner surfaces. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets. Cleaning products should not be used near children. Staff should ensure

that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent attendees or themselves from inhaling toxic vapours.

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Areas to be cleaned and disinfected

Any surfaces that are frequently touched should be prioritised for cleaning, e.g. door handles, seating, counters, phones, POS machines, vending machines, acrylic screens (if installed) and bathroom and other sanitary facilities, including bathroom fixtures like taps and flushing handles. Any surfaces that are visibly dirty, or have a spill, should be cleaned as soon as they are identified, regardless of when they were last cleaned. Shared objects should be cleaned and disinfected between uses—for example, payment terminals, tables and countertops.

Seating (where applicable) and other surfaces frequently touched by attendees during the event should be disinfected at regular intervals. Seating surfaces should be wipeable and easy to clean, if seats have fabric coverings application of wipeable covers is required or alternatively a disposable cover is to be applied and replaced after each use.

What should cleaners wear?

In most circumstances, it will not be necessary for cleaners to wear protective clothing to clean the premises. However, workers should use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is necessary for the products they are using. Gloves and a disposable apron are the minimum requirements. Medical masks should be used if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. Clothes that can be washed afterwards are suitable.

For events with greater than 100 potential attendees:

- There shall be ongoing cleaning and disinfection operations of all the areas of the venue accessible to the public
- Event organisers should have protocols in place for actions to be taken in case an attendee, member or staff or volunteer develops coronavirus symptoms while on the premises, including appropriate cleaning and disinfection.

Protocols for isolating suspected cases

Standards applicable to all events:

Staff, volunteers and attendees who develop or are noted to have potential COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) at the event should be isolated immediately. Individuals who feel unwell with such symptoms should call 111 (+356 21 324086 if calling from a non-Maltese SIM/line) between 6am and 9pm and go home or to a healthcare facility as directed, depending on how severe their symptoms are. If you are calling

an ambulance (112) or bringing someone who is severely ill to a hospital or other healthcare facility, call first to alert them that the person may have COVID-19.

Individuals who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms should similarly be isolated, sent home, and advised to call 111 (+356 21 324086 if calling from a non-Maltese SIM/line) between 6am and 9pm and follow public health guidance for community-related exposure. If symptoms develop, individuals should follow public health guidance in this regard.

For events with greater than 100 potential attendees:

Organisers should establish procedures for safely transporting sick individuals to their home or to a healthcare facility. Event organisers should work with venue administrators, local officials, and healthcare providers to identify an isolation area for any individual who has COVID-like symptoms or who has tested positive but does not have symptoms.

For further information and updates visit www.covid19health.gov.mt