

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Measures for In-Person Meetings

PURPOSE

This document describes mitigation measures for in-person meetings, conferences, or events (hereafter referred to as meetings), to reduce the risk of COVID-19 where the COVID-19 Community Level as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is Medium or Low. Meeting organizers are advised to coordinate with local public health authorities to ensure these measures are followed and any site-specific concerns are addressed. In general, large meetings of 50 or more persons should not occur if the Community Level is High.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 Community Level, as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is a tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on data related to new COVID-19 cases and hospital usage data. Communities are rated High, Medium, or Low based on three CDC data points: new COVID-19 admissions, the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and total new COVID-19 cases as described in Table 1 below. See the CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>) for further details on determining Community Levels. The Community Level for a specific county is readily available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>.

Table 1. CDC COVID-19 Community Levels and Indicators

New COVID Cases (per 100,000 population in the last 7 days)	Indicators	Low	Medium	High
< 200 COVID cases	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	< 10.0	10.0 - 19.9	≥ 20.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	< 10.0%	10.0 - 14.9%	≥ 15.0%
≥ 200 COVID cases	New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	NA	< 10.0	≥ 10.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	NA	< 10.0%	≥ 10.0%

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

General

Follow the most current DoD and Army orders regarding vaccination requirements for meetings.

At all COVID-19 Community Levels, installations must follow the most stringent state, local, or installation protective measures and must follow any additional requirements based on the installation Health Protection Condition (HPCON) level. Commanders and meeting organizers may choose to implement more stringent (protective) measures than are required by the CDC Community Level. Meeting organizers should review applicable state and local regulations regarding in-person meetings. If the in-person meeting is on a military installation, review installation policies on in-person meetings and recommendations for isolation and quarantine for restriction of movement (ROM) for travelers. Understand that these regulations may change rapidly depending on local epidemiology or other factors.

During travel to and from the meeting, individuals should practice non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), including maintaining social distancing (6-ft minimum), wearing enhanced masks, washing hands often or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and practicing good personal hygiene.

Individuals with underlying medical conditions that place them at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 should consult with their personal healthcare provider before deciding whether to participate in any in-person meeting.

Provide hand washing or hand sanitizer stations throughout the meeting site.

Screen all individuals for COVID-19 signs and symptoms prior to entry to the meeting. If symptoms are present, do not allow the individual to enter the meeting. Temperature screening is not advised in a non-medical setting.

Ensure ventilation (HVAC system), including heating or air-conditioning, has been optimized to reduce the potential for SARS-CoV-2 transmission with increased air changes per hour.

Designate a meeting point of contact (POC) and identify a local POC (i.e., installation public health, county public health) to respond to specific local COVID-19-related issues and questions. Communicate this information at the beginning of the meeting. Provide handouts or wallet cards with POC information to local installation medical providers to facilitate communication and reporting if an individual develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

Minimize the number of personnel assigned to common spaces, maximize their physical distance apart, and maximize available ventilation. For lodging, people should have their own room and bathroom facilities, if possible. For hotels, to the extent possible, guests should be in the same wing/floor of the hotel to minimize contact with other guests.

Masks/respirators are not required at the Low of Medium COVID-19 Community Level, but remind attendees that they may choose to wear a mask if they wish to reduce their risk of exposure and infection. APHC recommends following the most current CDC guidance on masking (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>). The use of N95, KN95, or KF94 masks (i.e., respirators) is preferred when such masks are available. An alternative is using a three-layer mask. These types of masks offer better protection than paper or cloth single-layer masks. Meeting organizers should provide enhanced masks (N-95/KN-95 respirators or triple-layer masks) for onsite optional use by meeting attendees, where they did not bring a respirator/mask but feel more comfortable wearing one.

Whenever possible, limit the number of attendees or increase the space available to keep the density of personnel as low as possible. This allows space for social distancing and increases

the effectiveness of ventilation systems. Where possible, indoor activities should provide at least 36 square feet (sq. ft.) per person to allow for adequate social distancing. To calculate the maximum number of participants permitted to attend a meeting, first determine the usable square footage of the indoor space in sq. ft. and divide by 36 (e.g., 2,850 sq. ft. meeting space / 36 = maximum of 79 persons permitted to attend the meeting).

Optional Protective Measures

These additional *optional* protective measures can be employed to help reduce overall risk:

The FDA-authorized vaccines remain the most effective means of preventing severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19, including all known variants. The risk of infection and severe outcomes further decreases for those who have received a booster dose of vaccine. Encourage all eligible attendees to be fully vaccinated or, optimally, up-to-date on recommended COVID-19 vaccinations, per CDC guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html>.

If masks are required, eliminate eating and drinking during the meeting to eliminate time without masks.

Move indoor meetings to outdoor locations.

Administer an over-the-counter rapid antigen test immediately before the meeting to each attendee in an effort to detect current infection.

OVERALL RISK

Meeting organizers are advised to carefully monitor the COVID-19 Community Levels leading up to the meeting to determine the most appropriate mitigation measures that will be required at the time of the meeting. The risk of COVID-19 being a medically significant disease within a meeting will depend on the COVID-19 Community Level at the time of the meeting and the extent to which mitigation measures are followed. While following the mitigation plan and recommendations can reduce risk, it is not possible to entirely eliminate risk.

PUBLIC HEALTH SUPPORT

Meeting organizers should consult with local public health support or the installation or military treatment facility/clinic public health emergency officer (PHEO) for more detailed guidance and to address local questions.

Additional support is also available by contacting the APHC COVID-19 Task Force via their group email box (usarmy.apg.medcom-aphc.mbx.covid-19-task-force@mail.mil).