

Interim Recommendations for Mass Public Gatherings

March 12, 2020

Background

As of March 12, 2020, there was one identified case of COVID-19 coronavirus in the City of Philadelphia, and 39 additional persons under investigation. There are additional cases in the metropolitan area. Not all of these cases reported travel to an area affected by the outbreak or exposure to a known local case. We expect additional cases of this infection to be identified in the future.

A number of the people associated with known cases of COVID-19 infection have symptoms, but limitations on laboratory testing and delays in conducting testing mean that additional cases may be occurring undetected. Experience from other cities and other countries indicate that the number of cases can increase very rapidly.

Mass public gatherings increase the likelihood that this infection will spread further in the area because of:

- the increased likelihood that these gatherings will attract people from a broad geographic area,
- the often prolonged time period during which large numbers of people are in close proximity,
- the difficulty in tracing exposure when large numbers of people attend a single event,
- the inability to ensure that attendees will follow adequate hygienic and social distancing practices.

The experience in other cities confirm the potential for extensive spread of COVID-19 at mass gatherings. Gatherings of communities of faith may present additional risks because of traditional practices such as shaking hands or sharing communal food, drink, or objects. To reduce that risk, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health makes the following recommendations.

Note that these are interim recommendations that will likely change as the situation in Philadelphia changes.

Recommendations

- **The Department of Public Health strongly recommends not holding gatherings of more than 250 attendees**, with a gathering defined by the number of persons in a single room or space. In view of the risk, those planning non-essential gatherings may choose on their own to discontinue gatherings of smaller sizes. If groups choose to hold large gatherings, they should carefully adhere to the recommendations below.
- Announce clearly that people who are sick with *fever and recent onset of cough should NOT attend*, and should instead stay away from other people.
- Discourage persons with chronic illnesses (such as heart disease, diabetes, or kidney disease) and persons above the age of 60 from attending because of the risk to their own health.
- Try to offer alternative distant viewing and participation options, such as by video or audio recording or live streaming, and reduce in-person participation by encouraging use of these options.
- Arrange to increase the physical distance between attendees to three feet or more, such as filling only alternate seats.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to attendees, and ask all attendees to wash hands or clean them with alcohol-based hand sanitizer before the meeting or event.
- Instruct attendees to refrain from shaking or holding hands or otherwise touching each other at the gathering.
- Do not offer or allow attendees to share cups, bowls, utensils, food or drink, for example at faith gatherings.
- Do not offer food and drink, because it increases the likelihood that people will come in proximity and share these.
- Post signs explaining these procedures at entryways and announce them during the event.

Note

- At this time, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health does not recommend closure of schools (unless a confirmed case is identified within the school) or discontinuation of transit or transportation services. These services are essential to the city's functioning and present lower risk of spread than mass gatherings.