Considerations for Resuming Meetings and Patient Programs

Updated March 8, 2020

What’s New: Added link to Screening at Facility Entrances guidance. Ministries should ensure they meet all state/local criteria as well as criteria set forth by their ministry prior to scheduling gatherings or in-person group sessions.

A gathering refers to a planned or spontaneous event, indoors or outdoors, with a small number of people participating or a large number of people in attendance such as a classes and conferences. The complexities, uncertainties and ongoing nature of COVID-19 suggest that simply resuming previous approaches to gatherings will not ensure the safety of our patients, colleagues and community members. Outbreaks in COVID-19 after public gatherings have demonstrated the increased risk that can occur with in-person gatherings.

Replace in-person meetings with video- or tele-conference calls whenever possible. As feasible, offer options for attendees at higher risk for severe illness (older adults and people of any age with underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk (such as virtual attendance). Ministries should be aware of the CDC guidance Considerations for Events and Gatherings when making decisions about resuming meeting and programs. Ministries should ensure that they have met all criteria and abide by the restrictions set forth for gatherings in their state and local areas prior to scheduling gatherings or in-person group sessions. Any ministry that has not yet met these requirements should not schedule gatherings of any size or for any reason. Because the COVID-19 virus circulation varies in communities, once scheduled, organizers should continually assess, based on current conditions, whether to postpone, cancel, or significantly reduce the number of attendees for gatherings.

Principles:
- The more people with whom an individual interacts at a gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the greater the potential risk for becoming infected with COVID-19 and/or spreading the virus.
- The higher the level of community transmission in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk is of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering.

Levels of Risk for Meeting Activities:
- **Lowest risk:** Virtual-only activities and meetings. Virtual activities are the preferred method and should be used for as much of any program as possible.
- **Moderate risk:** Smaller (ten people or less) in-person meetings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).
- **Higher risk:** Medium-sized (ten to twenty people) in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.
- **Highest risk:** Large (more than twenty people) in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

**Considerations for Maintaining Healthy Environments During Gatherings:**

- **Engineering Controls and HVAC:**
  - **Room Size/Number of Attendees:** The gathering room size must be able to accommodate participants sitting and moving about to remain at least six feet apart (social distancing) on all sides. **Limit attendance to the size of the room that can accommodate a six-foot perimeter around each participant.** The size of a gathering should be determined based on state and local safety laws and rules and the standards set forth in the MercyOne Resuming Operations Guidebook. Remove, block off, or arrange seats to maintain a six-foot radius between participants. For example, a 20x25 foot classroom (500sf) should hold a maximum of 17 participants including the instructor:

  ![Diagram showing room size and spacing](image)

  
  30sf per person

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SqFt per Occupant</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room Usable SqFt</td>
<td># of Occupants</td>
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  - **Ventilation:** Ensure a minimum 2 air changes per hour. For meeting space that has operable windows, if outdoor conditions permit consider opening windows to increase dilution and air exchange from outdoor air. If moisture or condensation appears on the indoor supply air grills or along the base boards, close the windows and run the air-conditioning at design set point. This is typically 74°F. Avoid use of fans that would blow directly from one individual to another.

  - **Modified Layouts:** Use multiple entrances to discourage crowded waiting areas. Eliminate lines and queues at entrances; use directional signage, stanchions with rope guides as needed, and floor markers to prevent bunching as participants enter or exit.
Screening: All attendees should be screened according to Screening at Facility Entrances. Advise attendees to stay home if they have symptoms of COVID-19 (or tested positive; but have no symptoms) or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Ensure that screeners have appropriate PPE and disinfection supplies.

Facial Covering: Participants are required to cover mouth and nose with cloth face coverings when in a gathering area to contain respiratory secretions. Make alternate arrangements for those individuals who are unable to wear facial covering.

Physical Contact: Participants should avoid handshakes and other physical contact at all times.

Hand Hygiene/Respiratory Etiquette: Participants should cover the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Tissues should be thrown in the trash immediately and hands washed with soap and water for a minimum of twenty seconds.

Supplies: Ensure that adequate supplies are available to support healthy hygiene – soap and water, hand sanitizer (at least sixty percent ethanol or seventy percent isopropyl alcohol), tissues, paper towels, disinfectant wipes, and trash cans.

Restrooms: Allow extra break time to stagger the number of people who occupy the restroom at one time (allow for social distancing). Ensure that restrooms are operational and are cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Food/Food Service: Avoid offering food products/snacks and beverages. If food or beverages must be available (bottled water), they should be in separate contained, disposable options.

Disinfection: Make arrangements to ensure that the gathering space is disinfected after each meeting according to CDC guidelines.

References:

Interim Guidance: Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Sheriff, R.E., 2020. Building Ventilation – The Proper Air Changes Per hour (ACH_
https://www.atlenv.com/building-ventilation-the-proper-air-changes-per-hour-ach

Ventilation for Acceptable indoor Air Quality, 2003