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Guidelines

Mass Gatherings During COVID19

Objective

To provide guidelines to the local authorities, organizers and participants of mass gatherings on planning and preparing for such events while ensuring minimum risk of COVID-19 transmission, that is known to be associated with mass gatherings.

Rationale

In the context of COVID-19, mass gatherings are events that could amplify the transmission of the virus and potentially disrupt the country's response capacity. COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person through respiratory droplets and contact with contaminated surfaces, and the risk of transmission appears to be proportional to the closeness (less than 2 meter) and frequency of the interaction between an infected individual and an unaffected individual.

Public gathering means where people are assembled on any given space; indoor or outdoor, for some purpose such as cultural event, religious gathering, sports event, entertainment, political or similar occasions. However, specific separate guidelines for wedding and sporting event have been prepared.

Preparations-Administrative and Logistics

Local and national health authorities are the primary source of information and advice about COVID-19 in communities. They provide information about locally mandated restrictions on the movement of people, whether gatherings are permitted and, if so, of what size.

- Establishing direct links and channels of communication between event organizers, health authorities, local authorities looking after events and gatherings and other relevant stakeholders.
- Establishing a clear line of command and control and enabling efficient situation analysis and decision-making for the gatherings
- Modify the characteristics of the event such as venue, attendees, facilities, equipment as per requirement.
- In **In-door gathering**, it is suggested to have maximum participation of not more than 500 persons where food is not served on the occasion, or 50% of seating capacity of the venue.
- Strict compliance with face masks and hand sanitization is required, and it is suggested that the organizers provide face masks and hand sanitizers to all entrants of the event.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible for example, by opening windows and doors.



- If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses
- For **out-door gatherings**, well defined locations must be chosen, the seating arrangement must be at least 3 feet apart with no one allowed to stand in-between the rows during the gathering
- Rallies and gathering on ill-defined venues such as streets and roads should be avoided.
- Ensure separate gates for entrance and exit of the visitors to avoid over-crowding. Consideration for multiple entry and exit points is suggested.
- The overall duration of events should be not more than 3 hours.
- No handshaking and hugging is permitted
- Focus on the capacity of health and other relevant authorities and organizers to strengthen preparedness and response to a public health issue that occurs before, during, or after the mass gathering event.

Role of Organizers

- Focal points/committees for covid management must be identified for each gathering to liaise with public health authorities and be accountable for the arrangements
- Ensure the availability of thermal screening at entrance and allow individuals to enter in event only after checking their temperature.
- Do not allow any individual to enter the premises without face mask, provision (sale or distribution) of face masks and hand sanitizers at entry should be arranged. A mini sanitizer bottle and face mask package to be arranged for all by organizers
- Seating arrangement should also be at least 3 feet apart for outdoor events. Where necessary, create and assign fixed seating to maintain safe distances. For indoor events, people should be seated with one vacant seat between two consecutive seated persons.
- Adequate ventilation mechanisms should be used in indoor facilities.
- Advise people to observe physical distancing, respiratory/cough etiquette, and hand hygiene practices.
- Do not allow the individuals with cough and flu to enter the premises.
- Ensure regular and thorough cleaning and disinfection of the venue with the chlorine solution by the designated staff.
- Ensure availability of handwashing facilities with soap and water, and/or hand rub dispensers with alcohol-based (70%) hand sanitizer at the venue.
- People with higher risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g. with co-morbidity of diabetes, hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases and elderly people), and children under the age of 12 years should not attend the gatherings/event.
- No food to be served in any public gatherings and only consider prepacked packages if absolutely necessary
- Special arrangements for water dispensations to be ensured at all events to avoid crowding including individual pre-packed water bottles.



- Ensure provision for detecting and monitoring event-related cases of COVID-19 and protocol for the sentinel surveillance according to the local public health guidelines.
- In case attendees, organizing staff develop symptoms during the event, event organizers should liaise with national and local health authorities, as well with those of the participant's home city or country, and facilitate sharing of information.
- **No public gathering to be held in cities where test positivity ratio is consistently higher than 6-9% or above as laid down in instructions (Quantified triggers and corresponding NPIs)**

Role of Attendees/ Visitors

The transmission of COVID 19 occurs through suspended air droplets or respiratory droplets settled on a person's hands and can be passed on to others through physical contact. To avoid this, following is recommended:

- Ensure wearing a face mask before leaving house or at the venue.
- Maintain the safe distance of 2 meters (6 feet) from each other indoors/ outdoors.
- Use hand sanitizers frequently in the event/gathering
- Greet people at the entry with friendly words and smiles, rather than handshakes or other forms of physical contact.
- Prevent touching of objects that are accustomed to communal handling.
- Consider using individual pre-packaged boxes/servings rather than shared portions from communal containers.
- Carefully read and adhere to all visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Establish routine cleaning of area with disinfectant including the indoor spaces, open courtyards, and other buildings where people gather. The chance of transmission through inanimate surfaces is less, and only in instances where an infected person coughs or sneezes on the surface, and someone else touches that surface after the cough or sneeze.
- Disinfect the frequently touched objects such as doorknobs, light switches, and stair railings.
- Disinfect the public washrooms and ensure the availability of soap, running water and disinfectants.
- The preference of affinity of the chemical disinfectants, recommended concentration, surfaces to be tackled, toxicity, contact time, frequency, duration, and stability of the product should be according to the focused microorganisms. (Separate guidelines on the Cleaning & Disinfection of Environmental Surfaces)
 - Disinfect surfaces with 70% alcohol where the use of bleach is not suitable.
 - Freshly prepared 1% sodium hypochlorite is also used.



Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international & national recommendations and best practices.

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of Ms Javeria Yousaf and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.

References:

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

For more information, please contact:

HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH, PM National Health Complex, Islamabad

<http://covid.gov.pk/>

<http://nhsrc.gov.pk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSRCOfficial>

<http://www.hsa.edu.pk/>

<https://twitter.com/nhsrcofficial>

<https://www.nih.org.pk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/NHSRC-PK>