



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

March 11, 2020

DEPARTMENT CIRCULAR

No. 2020 - 0130

TO: ALL UNDERSECRETARIES AND ASSISTANT SECRETARIES; DIRECTORS OF BUREAUS AND CENTERS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT; MINISTER OF HEALTH – BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO; EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF SPECIALTY HOSPITALS AND NATIONAL NUTRITION COUNCIL; CHIEFS OF MEDICAL CENTERS, HOSPITALS, SANITARIA AND INSTITUTES; PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINE HEALTH INSURANCE CORPORATION; DIRECTORS OF PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL AND TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION CENTERS AND ALL OTHERS CONCERNED

SUBJECT: Public Advisory No. 15 - Guidance on Gatherings for the Public and Event Organizers


Social distancing or reducing close contact has been documented to slow the spread of respiratory virus infections, including COVID-19. In view of the ongoing threat of the spread of the COVID-19, the Department of Health is issuing this guidance on gatherings for the benefit of the public and event organizers.

1. The Department of Health **strongly urges** the public to minimize participation and events organizers to avoid mounting gatherings wherein **space limitation and nature of activity** puts attendees within arm's length of each other (or less than 3 feet or 1 meter).
2. National government agencies, local chief executives, school administrators, and religious leaders are strongly encouraged to **regulate or limit** gatherings.
3. If organization of such gatherings cannot be deferred cancelled, the event organizers are able to guarantee compliance with the prescribed guidelines (Annexes A & B), **and** are willing to take full responsibility for compliance therewith including healthcare expenses of the participants, unless such gatherings have been declared prohibited by relevant national or local government agencies.
4. If participation to such gatherings cannot be avoided, the DOH reminds the general public to abide by the following guidelines and continue to practice general preventive measures:
 - a. Do not attend if you are sick or at increased risk for severe illness. Based on current evidence, the following are considered to have increased risk:
 - i. elderly (current evidence suggests 59 years as median age of reported cases, and 66 years as median age for critically ill)

- ii. persons with underlying medical problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic lung disease, and immunosuppression
- b. Practice frequent hand-washing with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizers.
- c. Use tissue paper to cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing, properly dispose and wash hands afterwards.
- d. Distance yourself from others when coughing or sneezing.
- e. Maintain at least one meter distance from persons with signs of respiratory illness.

DOH assures the public that all measures to contain the potential spread of COVID-19 infection are being explored, studied, and implemented to keep the Filipino people safe from the threats of this infectious disease. While the recommended measures may entail significant inconvenience, the health and safety of the public remain the priority of the DOH and the Philippine government.

Dissemination of the information to all concerned is requested.


FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc
Secretary of Health

Annex A. Guidelines for Event Organizers in Areas WITHOUT Local and Community Transmission

Organizers of events in areas without local and community transmission must:

1. Create contingency plans which detail how events may be modified, cancelled or postponed, in the event that a COVID-19 outbreak occurs.
2. Coordinate early with Provincial/City/Municipal Health Office, hotels where participants are staying, airlines, the event venue, and other partners.
3. Promote the following messages targeted towards participants and staff:
 - a. Stay home when sick, except to seek medical care.
 - b. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash.
 - c. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - d. Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - e. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
 - f. Recommend that participants minimize close contact (e.g., recommending no hand shaking or hugging).
4. Ensure that the following are in place: refund policies or remote participation capability (e.g. live stream, accommodating work arrangements)
5. Make available COVID-19 prevention supplies at events, including face masks, sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, and tissues.
6. Provide for a designated space to isolate and arrange for transport those who become ill with symptoms at the events.
7. Note that it is NOT necessary to distribute masks to healthy participants.

Annex B. Guidelines for Event Organizers in Areas WITH Local and Community Transmission

Organizers of events in areas with local or community transmission must:

1. Anticipate that some non-essential events may need to be modified (e.g., conducted as a video webinar), canceled, or postponed.
2. Cancel non-essential events which will be attended by older adults and people with chronic medical conditions at higher risk for severe illness
 - a. Current evidence indicates that the risk of severe illness increases with age. The median age of reported cases has been 59 years and the median age of critically ill cases has been 66 years. People with underlying medical problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic lung disease, and immunosuppression, are also likely at higher risk for severe illness.
3. Work with Provincial/City/Municipal Health Office and other stakeholders to prepare for the implementation of the contingency plan.
4. Promote the following messages targeted towards participants and staff:
 - a. Stay home when sick, except to seek medical care.
 - b. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash.
 - c. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - d. Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - e. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
 - f. Recommend that participants minimize close contact (e.g., recommending no hand shaking or hugging).
5. Ensure that the following are in place: refund policies or remote participation capability (e.g. phone, video, or web-based application, accommodating work arrangements). Remove disincentives for non-participation.
6. Instruct any participants or event staff to not attend if:
 - a. They have any respiratory symptoms (cough or runny nose) or fever regardless of the presumed cause;
 - b. They have travelled within the past 14 days to areas with local transmission (PUMs); or
 - c. They are at higher risk of severe illness
7. Ensure that the venue is spacious/designed such that participants can maintain 1 meter or 3 feet distance.
8. Provide for supplies of masks in case anyone gets sick, soap and water in handwashing areas, hand sanitizers and isopropyl alcohol in areas with limited or no access to wash areas with soap and water, and information materials on COVID-19 to be posted around the premises;

9. Have protocols to regularly clean commonly used areas with detergent and water.
10. Provide hand-washing stations, where possible, and alcohol-based sanitizers for the public.
11. Make frequent announcements to remind the public of preventive measures (i.e. handwashing, proper cough etiquette).
12. Place receptacles where used tissue papers can be thrown.
13. Keep a registration list of participants and staff; with updated contact details. Ensure comprehensive and detailed documentation (i.e. room assignments, schedules, daily check-up logs, etc.);
14. This will aid DOH and local authorities in contact tracing in the event a COVID-19 case should later be identified as having attended the event.
15. Implement screening at entry points to the event before allowing guests to enter the premises of the event.
 - a. Use infrared thermometers
 - b. Inquire about travel history and symptoms
16. Screen all participants for fever and respiratory symptoms on a daily basis, if applicable.
17. Have medical personnel available 24/7 to attend to the needs of all involved
18. Provide for a designated space to isolate and arrange for transport those who become ill with symptoms at the events. Provide a clean disposable procedure facemask to wear for those who may become ill. Establish procedures to help sick participants or staff leave the event as soon as possible without use of public transportation, shared rides, or taxis.
19. Connect with the regional DOH Center for Health and Development (CHD) for close coordination of possible COVID-19 events that may occur during the course of these activities.