

# Considerations for Mass Gatherings in the context of COVID-19

## Annex: Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19

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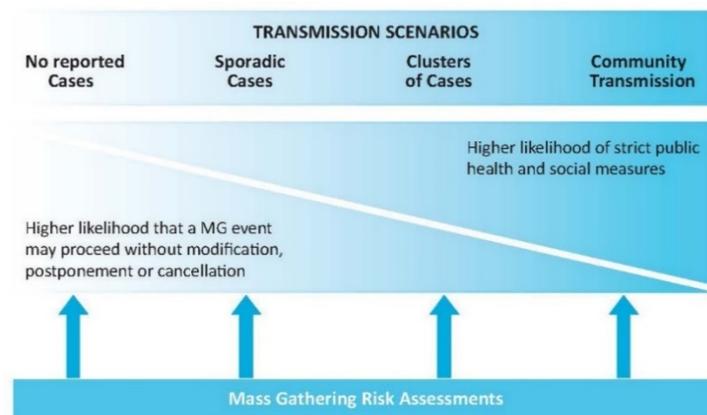


### Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries across the globe have implemented several public health and social measures (PHSM), including physical distancing, closure of schools and businesses, geographical area quarantine, and movement restrictions. As the local epidemiology of the disease changes, countries will adjust (loosen/reinstate) these measures accordingly. On 16 April 2020, WHO published an interim guidance document that provides advice on adjusting public health and social measures,<sup>1</sup> while managing the risk of resurgence of cases. A series of annexes has been developed to guide countries through adjusting public health and social measures in different contexts. The purpose of this annex is to provide key considerations to health authorities and event organizers for reopening mass gatherings (MG); it should be read in conjunction with the interim guidance.<sup>1</sup>

Mass gatherings are events characterized by the concentration of people at a specific location for a specific purpose over a set period of time, which have the potential to strain the planning and response resources of the host country or community.<sup>2</sup> In the context of COVID-19, mass gatherings are events with a high density of individuals present in a venue for a defined period of time, which can amplify transmission of COVID-19, and place additional strain on a country's healthcare system.

WHO currently defines four transmission scenarios for COVID-19<sup>3</sup> (no reported cases, sporadic cases, clusters of cases and community transmission). As the pandemic evolves, countries or areas will move from one transmission scenario to another (in either direction) and may experience a resurgence in cases interspersed with periods of low-level transmission. In countries where the overall intensity of transmission is decreasing, and public health and social measures are being lifted, reopening mass gatherings can be considered. As these measures are adjusted, countries should recognize that it may be necessary to reintroduce such measures to manage an increased number of cases. This means that the epidemiological situation may vary based on the geographical area and time in which the event takes place. As such, countries and event organizers need to apply a dynamic approach to risk mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in events.



### Risk assessment before restarting mass gatherings

Mass gatherings are not merely recreational activities; they can impact the psychological well-being of many individuals (e.g. religious events), encourage healthy behaviours (e.g. sports) and have large social and economic impacts on the community. The process leading to restarting mass gatherings should be driven by a thorough risk assessment, such as the WHO Mass Gatherings COVID-19 risk assessment,<sup>4</sup> which considers both the risk factors associated with an event and the organizers' capacity to mitigate them.

WHO has developed tools that can assign a numerical score to each risk factor and mitigation measure of an event,<sup>4,5</sup> which allows for calculation of an overall risk score. The overall score can then be put into the decision matrix<sup>5</sup> to obtain a risk category (very low, low, moderate, very high), which corresponds to recommendations on the implementation of the event.<sup>5,6</sup> As the level of risk is dynamic and may change over time, a review of the risk assessment at regular intervals is required. Event planners should conduct

the risk assessment in partnership with local and national public health authorities. It is vital that the results of the mass gathering risk assessment are clearly communicated to the public to build trust and ensure that people are aware of, and understand, the decisions made on restarting mass gatherings. General considerations and advice addressing risks of any origin should also be taken into account when planning a mass gathering event, as highlighted in WHO's publication *Public health for mass gatherings: key considerations*.<sup>7</sup>

## References

1. World Health Organization. Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19 (Interim Guidance). Geneva, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/considerations-in-adjusting-public-health-and-social-measures-in-the-context-of-covid-19-interim-guidance>, accessed 19 March 2020)
2. World Health Organization. Key planning recommendations for Mass Gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak (Interim Guidance). Geneva 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/key-planning-recommendations-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-the-current-covid-19-outbreak>, accessed 19 March 2020)
3. World Health Organization. Critical preparedness, readiness and response actions for COVID-19 (Interim Guidance). Geneva, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/critical-preparedness-readiness-and-response-actions-for-covid-19>, accessed 30 April 2020).
4. World Health Organization. How to use WHO risk assessment and mitigation checklist for Mass Gatherings in the context of COVID-19 (Interim Guidance). Geneva 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/how-to-use-who-risk-assessment-and-mitigation-checklist-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-covid-19>, accessed 19 March 2020)
5. World Health Organization. Mass Gatherings risk assessment COVID-19: Key considerations (Excel tool). Geneva, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/mass-gathering-risk-assessment-covid-19-key-considerations>, accessed 19 March 2020)
6. World Health Organization. Decision tree flow chart for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19. Geneva 2020 (<https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/decision-tree-for-risk-assessment-for-mass-gathering>, accessed 30 April 2020)
7. World Health Organization. Public Health for Mass Gatherings: Key Considerations. Geneva, 2015 ([https://www.who.int/ihr/publications/WHO\\_HSE\\_GCR\\_2015.5/en/](https://www.who.int/ihr/publications/WHO_HSE_GCR_2015.5/en/), accessed 30 April 2020).

### Additional WHO COVID-19 MG Technical Guidance and Tools

- Key planning recommendations for MG in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak ([available on WHO website](#))
- Generic Risk Assessment and Mitigation Checklist ([available on WHO website](#))
- Decision tree flow chart for mass gatherings in context of COVID-19 ([available on WHO website](#))
- FAQs on Mass Gatherings and COVID-19 including Sporting Events FAQs ([available on WHO website](#))
- Sports addendum risk assessment and mitigation checklist ([available on WHO website](#))
- Religious addendum risk assessment and mitigation checklist ([available on WHO website](#))
- Ramadan guidelines ([available on WHO website](#))
- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) technical guidance: Humanitarian operations, camps, and other fragile settings as well as refugees and migrants in non-humanitarian and non-camp settings ([available on WHO website](#))

## Acknowledgments

This document was developed in consultation with: WHO COVID-19 IMST pillar leads, WHO Mass Gathering Regional Focal Points and WHO COVID-19 Mass Gathering Expert Group.

WHO continues to monitor the situation closely for any changes that may affect this interim guidance. Should any factors change, WHO will issue a further update. Otherwise, this interim guidance document will expire 2 years after the date of publication.

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