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Interim Guidance for Large Gatherings and Public Spaces During the COVID-19 Outbreak

March 13, 2020

Background:

In December 2019, a new respiratory disease called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was detected in China. COVID-19 is caused by a virus (SARS-CoV-2) that is part of a large family of viruses called coronaviruses. Recently, community-wide transmission of COVID-19 has occurred in the United States, including New York where the number of both persons under investigation and confirmed cases are rapidly increasing.

It is therefore directed that any gathering with 500 or more participants be cancelled or postponed. This guidance is intended to determine whether or not a gathering of 500 or fewer participants can safely continue during the outbreak period.

This guidance is not intended for governmental, medical, educational, retail spaces, or mass transportation facilities, including but not limited to:

- Schools,
- Libraries,
- Government Buildings,
- Hospitals,
- Residential Health Care Facilities,
- Retail Establishments, including:
 - Grocery Stores,
 - Pharmacies,
- Public Transit Facilities:
 - Trains/Railway Stations,
 - Subway Terminals, and
 - Buses and Bus Terminals.

Large gatherings and public spaces within the scope of this guidance include, but are not limited to:

- Theaters,
- Auditoriums,
- Concerts,
- Conferences,
- Worship services,
- Sporting events,
- Restaurants,
- Bars,
- Gaming establishments, and
- Physical fitness centers.

Members of the public who are sick with COVID-19 symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, troubled breathing) or susceptible to infectious illnesses (e.g. older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, heart disease, diabetes) should not attend large gatherings.

Guidance:

Effective March 13, 2020 at 5:00PM, organizers hosting large gatherings must postpone or cancel any events with in-person attendance of more than 500 participants.

Effective March 13, 2020 at 5:00PM, private and public operators of establishments or organizers of events with fewer than 500 occupants or attendees must operate at no more than 50% of their maximum occupancy.

There are limited exceptions to the restrictions prescribed in this guidance. Specifically, businesses that are not gathering places can seek an exemption from the State Commissioner of Health that would allow for capacity in excess of these limits, if appropriate social distance can be maintained and the risk of viral transmission is low. Please call the New York State Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline at 1-888-364-3065 with specific questions about your establishment or event.

For all other gatherings or public spaces, private and public organizers and operators shall:

- **Promote messages that discourage people who are sick from attending or visiting:** This should include messages requesting that people leave if they begin to have symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. They should seek medical advice promptly by calling ahead to a doctor's office or emergency room prior to a medical evaluation.
- **Review existing plans and procedures:** Private and public operators or small event organizers should review their existing emergency plans and procedures for outbreak response to ensure plans meet the needs of the current and anticipated state of COVID-19 outbreak. Planning considerations include but are not limited to protection of staff and patrons, planning for staff absenteeism and supply chain interruptions. Develop new contingency plans if gaps are found in the current plans. Private and public operators and small event organizers should engage with key stakeholders and partners in the planning process. These partners include the local health department, community leaders, law enforcement, hospitals, emergency and first responders and vendors.
- **Consult state and local officials about local preparedness and response capacities:** Work closely with local public health officials to assess local capacities related to healthcare and law enforcement in the area. During a COVID-19 outbreak, resource limitations among local healthcare systems and/or law enforcement can influence the decision to modify, postpone or cancel your events. If it is determined local capacities are already limited by the COVID-19 outbreak and may be further strained by the event, private and

public operators and small event organizers should provide an alternate method for event delivery, postpone, or cancel.

- **Use alternative event delivery:** Private and public operators and small event organizers should consider and, if possible, develop alternative ways for participants to attend or participate in the event, such as by television, radio, or online. Large meetings may be conducted remotely by phone or video conferencing. Concert organizers may choose to offer a paid video stream for attendees wishing to watch from home. Places of worship may choose to offer a video or audio broadcast or stream for congregation members. Organizers of sporting events that are not already broadcast may research the feasibility of offering that option. Depending on available technology, video streaming options may be available at little to no cost for event organizers.
- **If a small event proceeds with in-person participation, use procedures for community containment strategies:** Train staff on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Event organizers should ensure that all event staff are trained on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. If any staff feel they have these symptoms, and possible exposure to COVID-19 they should call their healthcare provider. Staff should stay home if they are sick. The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, or trouble breathing.
- **Train all staff on proper hand and respiratory hygiene:** Small event organizers should take steps to ensure that all event staff are trained on proper hand and respiratory hygiene. Proper personal hygiene is a good preventative measure for all respiratory illnesses including COVID-19.

Hand Hygiene:

Signage with handwashing procedures should be posted in prominent locations promoting hand hygiene. Regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds should be done:

- Before and after eating.
- After sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing.
- After using the restroom.
- Before handling food.
- After touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated.
- After using shared equipment and supplies like electronic equipment such as keyboards, mice and phones.

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers by children should always be supervised by adults.

Respiratory Hygiene:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with tissues or the bend of elbow.

- Disposing of soiled tissues immediately after use.
- **Plan for staff absences:** Event staff need to stay home when they are sick, or they may need to stay home to care for a sick household member or care for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
- **Make reasonable accommodations for workers:** Persons with underlying health conditions or older adults are considered to be at increased risk for severe illness and complications from COVID-19. Event organizers can consider reassigning duties for high-risk staff in order to have minimal contact with other persons. People in high-risk groups should consult with their healthcare provider about attending large events.
- **Provide prevention supplies at your events:** Plan to have extra supplies on hand for event staff and participants to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, including sinks with soap, hand sanitizers, tissues, and disposable masks.

Disposable masks should be kept on-site and used only if someone (worker or attendee) becomes sick at your event. Those who become sick should be immediately isolated from staff and participants who are not sick and given a clean disposable facemask to wear while awaiting medical attention.

- **Identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event:** Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately. Work with partners, such as local hospitals, to create a plan for treating staff and participants who do not live nearby. Include a plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations.

For guidance on cleaning and disinfection of facilities that are hosting large gathering events, refer to the New York State Department of Health Interim Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Public and Private Facilities for COVID-19 at
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/docs/cleaning_guidance_general_building.pdf.

For further information: New York State Department of Health's COVID-19 Webpage
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

Local health department contact information can be found at:
https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/index.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Webpage:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>