

Phase Two Guidance
Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for Graduation Ceremonies
(Pre-Kindergarten – 12th Grade and Adult Education)

During Phase Two, the public, organizations, and businesses are required to adopt behaviors and rigorous safeguards to reduce risk for all. **This guidance is intended for schools serving Pre-Kindergarten-12th Grade and Adult Education students only that are considering holding in-person graduation ceremonies during Spring 2021. This guidance does not apply to colleges, universities, and any other post-secondary educational setting.** In-person graduation ceremonies will be allowed to occur with strong safeguards and physical distancing in place. The following measures must be implemented to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission amongst students, faculty, staff, guests, and the community. This is a supplementary document to *Guidance for Schools (Pre-Kindergarten–12th Grade and Adult Education)* found at coronavirus.dc.gov/phasetwo.

Please note that any individual experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or who was recently exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and needs to quarantine¹, must not attend or work as staff at a graduation ceremony due to the risk of exposing others. Symptoms of COVID-19 may include: fever (subjective or 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or otherwise feeling unwell.

Guidelines for In-Person Spring 2021 Graduation Ceremonies

- Graduation ceremonies for pre-Kindergarten-12th Grade and Adult Education may occur as long as the requirements in this document are met.
- Outdoor events are safer than indoor events and are encouraged, weather permitting. Have a back-up plan for any outdoor events.
- Mask wearing is mandatory.
- Outdoor graduation ceremonies are limited to 25% of the capacity of the space as specified in their Certificate of Occupancy, or 2000 people, whichever number is smaller. (For example: if occupancy limit of the space is 2500, 625 persons shall be permitted). If an outdoor space does not have a formal Certificate of Occupancy, 40 square feet per person shall be used to calculate the occupancy limit.
- Indoor graduation ceremonies are limited to 25% of the maximum occupancy of the space or 250 people, whichever number is smaller. (For example: if occupancy limit of the space is 800, 200 persons shall be permitted).
- After May 1, Indoor graduation ceremonies are limited to 25% of the maximum occupancy of the space or 500 people, whichever number is smaller. (For example: if occupancy limit of the space is 800, 200 persons shall be permitted).
- All persons present shall be included in the numerical attendance totals. This includes but is not limited to: students, faculty, staff, workers, vendors, guests, and speakers.
- Groups of guests must consist of 6 or fewer individuals. Groups must be separated from other groups by *at least* 6 feet.
- Adjust the size of the event as necessary to allow for all present (between guests or groups of guests) to maintain *at least* 6 feet social distancing at the event.
- Schools planning outdoor ceremonies should put careful thought and planning into a back-up plan in case of inclement weather. Back-up venues must meet all the requirements outlined in this guidance.
- Consider holding multiple smaller graduation ceremonies as necessary, so that all graduating

¹ For more information about quarantine see Guidance for *Quarantine after COVID-19 Exposure* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance

students can be accommodated while minimizing crowd sizes.

- Virtual events continue to be encouraged. Institutions that are holding in-person graduation ceremonies should also provide virtual (online) options for persons who do not wish to attend an in-person event. This will also promote smaller crowd size.
- Parades are prohibited.
- Only single performers/speakers will be allowed (e.g., no choirs or bands) at the commencement.
 - A minimum of 12 feet must be maintained from the audience if performers/speakers are masked
 - A minimum of 18 feet must be maintained from the audience if performers/speakers are unmasked
 - There should be no more than 10 people on any stage, and individuals the stage must be spaced at least 6 feet apart.
- Duration of ceremonies may not exceed 2 hours, but facilities may be open for an hour in advance and after the ceremony to prevent crowding at ingress and egress.
- Pre-assigned/reserved seating is recommended.

Students, Guests and Staff Should Practice Everyday Prevention Measures

- **Stay at home** if you are sick, if you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 10 days, are waiting for COVID-19 test results, or if you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and meet requirements to quarantine.¹
- **Practice social distancing.** Keep at least 6 feet of distance between you and other people who are not from your household.
- All persons **must** wear a face covering or facemask while at the event.
 - Masks are most effective if they fit snugly to the face and have 2-3 layers of tightly woven fabric.
 - Masks are not required for children 2 and under.
 - For more information about mask wearing see *Masks and Cloth Face Coverings for the General Public* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
 - People unable to wear masks should consider not attending in-person commencement ceremonies at this time.
- Interacting with more people in any setting raises your risk, so it is important to follow social distancing and mask/cloth face covering recommendations.
- Avoid shaking hands and physical contact with people who don't live with you. Instead wave and verbally greet people.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
 - If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Perform frequent hand hygiene (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
 - Key times to perform hand hygiene include:
 - When arriving at the venue,
 - Before eating or drinking,
 - After using the toilet,
 - Before and after putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings,
 - Before and after work shifts and work breaks,
 - After handling trash,
 - After handling another person's belongings, and
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- For more information about attending large gatherings see the article *Large Gatherings* at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/large-gatherings.html.

Organizer Considerations to Promote Student, Guest and Staff Safety

- School administrators have a responsibility to hold safe graduation ceremonies.
- Organizers must conduct a thorough assessment of the event venue to identify potential hazards that could increase risks for COVID-19 transmission.
- Signage must be posted at the entrance(s) stating that nobody with a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 is permitted to enter the event space and that individuals must wear a mask or face covering.
- Display signage throughout the event space reinforcing social distancing and hand hygiene policies.
- Ensure staff, students, and other attendees have access to face coverings. Consider providing disposable facemasks to attendees if they need one.
- Attendees traveling from outside of DC must follow all DC Health requirements for travel including travel-related testing and quarantine requirements. For more information see *Guidance for Travel* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.

Avoid Close Contact and Reduce Touchpoints

- Minimize face-to-face passing. Have separate entrances and exits for the venue to allow one-way flow of attendees.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors and sidewalks and signage, to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart in queuing areas, both inside and outside the venue.
- Protective barriers (plexiglass or similar) must be installed in all areas where there is staff/guest interaction that cannot occur with 6 feet of social distancing.
- Minimize use of shared objects during the event.
- Use visual cues to help prevent congregating in lobby or common areas.
- Reconfigure or mark seating arrangements in venues to delineate physically distant seating.
- All attendees must be seated and remain in their seats throughout the ceremony.
- A procession of graduates is allowable but the following must be ensured:
 - The graduates are spaced 6 feet from other students and seated attendees
 - Diplomas are passed with no handshakes/physical contact
- There should be no more than 10 people on any stage, and all people must maintain at least 6 feet from each other on the stage.
- If there are any speakers at the graduation ceremony, the following distance must be maintained between the speaker and the audience:
 - A minimum of 12 feet if speakers are masked
 - A minimum of 18 feet if speakers are unmasked
- Prohibit gathering or loitering after the ceremony, including outside the venue (e.g., in parking lots).
- Prohibit activities that require guests to cluster.
- Monitor areas prone to congregation (e.g., common areas, lobbies, restrooms, staff breakrooms, backstage areas).
- Any items handed out to guests must be single use or cleaned and disinfected between each guest use (e.g., assisted audio devices).

Food and Drink

- No food or beverage service will be allowed during ceremonies (including concession stands).
 - Guests may bring their own beverages/snacks as allowed per the venue.
 - Any beverages/snacks must be consumed while seated. Attendees may not leave their seats with beverages/snacks.
 - Face masks should only be removed while an attendee is actively eating or drinking.

Communication and Response

- Schools must develop a comprehensive plan to communicate measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 with all attendees of the event.
 - Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers in your communication plan.
 - Communicate COVID-19 policies to staff (including vendors), guests and students, (e.g., on school/event website, social media sites, prominent signage at entrances and throughout the venue, message screens and public announcements before and during the event).
- If an attendee becomes sick while at the event, schools must have a protocol in place for that individual to immediately leave the event. If they are unable to immediately leave (e.g., they need to wait for a ride), there should be a process that allows them to isolate until they are able to leave. People who are sick should go home or to a healthcare facility, depending on the severity of their symptoms. Public transportation should not be used.
- Schools must maintain a record of all individuals who attended the event for at least 30 days to assist with contact tracing. Information collected must include: name, date, phone number and email (if available). This information must be provided within 24 hours if requested by DC Health if a case of COVID-19 associated with the event occurs. Seating charts must also be provided if used.

If an attendee is diagnosed with COVID-19:

- **Identify a point of contact at the institution that staff or an attendee can notify if they test positive for COVID-19 within the 2 weeks from the date of the event**, and choose to disclose this information. Put systems in place to encourage self-reporting.
- If a case of COVID-19 associated with the event occurs, schools must have a notification process to share the following with event staff and attendees:
 - Education about COVID-19, including the signs and symptoms of COVID-19
 - Referral to the *Guidance for Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19*, available at coronavirus.dc.gov
 - Information on options for COVID-19 testing in the District of Columbia, available at coronavirus.dc.gov/testing
- If employees test positive for COVID-19, please refer to the guidance *First Steps for Non-Healthcare Employers when Employees Test Positive for COVID-19* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
 - A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of a person who tested positive for COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period, during that person's infectious period.
 - The infectious period starts two days before symptom onset and typically ends 10 days after symptom onset (or test date for people who do not have symptoms).
- Schools must notify DC Health when:
 - If anyone who attended a commencement ceremony notifies the school they **tested positive for COVID-19** (not before results come back)

AND

 - the person was at the event **during their infectious period**.
- Notify DC Health by submitting an online form on the DC Health COVID-19 Reporting Requirements website dchealth.dc.gov/page/covid-19-reporting-requirements:
 - Submit a **Non-Healthcare Facility COVID-19 Consult Form**.
- An investigator from DC Health will follow-up within 48 hours to all appropriately submitted notifications. Please note this time may increase as cases of COVID-19 increase in the District.

Additional Requirements

- For additional requirements, please refer to DC Health *Guidance for Schools (Pre-Kindergarten-12th Grade and Adult Education)* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance. In particular, see the

sections entitled “*Daily Health Screening*”, “*Cleaning and disinfection*” and, “*Building Considerations*”.

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit coronavirus.dc.gov regularly for the most current information.