



COVID-19 OUTBREAK: BRIEF GUIDE FOR MEETING ORGANISERS IN GLOBAL DUTY STATIONS

AIM

This document aims to provide meeting organisers with key information for organizing and managing meetings in light of the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreading globally. The guide should be reviewed and adapted in conjunction with local health authorities' and WHO country office advice.

BACKGROUND

Coronaviruses are a large family of respiratory viruses that cause diseases ranging from the common cold to the more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Although the current outbreak of COVID-19 is still being investigated, the virus appears to be moderately infectious and can be passed from human to human, primarily by droplet spread just like other respiratory viruses. While many cases will manifest as a mild illness, a small percentage progress to a more severe illness and pneumonia. For the latest situation update on the outbreak, see <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

KEY INFORMATION TO PROVIDE PARTICIPANTS

At present, influenza presents more risk to meeting attendees than COVID-19. The same guidance for influenza or any of the respiratory viruses also applies to COVID-19. The following key information should be shared with all meeting participants:

1. Avoid being exposed to respiratory viruses

- Avoid close contact (within 1 meter/3 feet) with people who are ill with fever, cough or respiratory symptoms.
- Wash or sanitize your hands frequently – this is one of the most effective measures available.
- Note that according to WHO, there is no evidence that individuals who are well and free from respiratory symptoms will benefit from wearing a mask.

2. Avoid spreading respiratory viruses if you are unwell

- Stay at home or in your accommodation if you become unwell, develop a fever or other respiratory symptoms.
- If you are unwell, inform the meeting organizer and arrange to get an assessment from a healthcare provider. It is best if you call the healthcare provider before visiting to inform of your condition.
- Maintain your distance from others – at least 1 m / 3 feet.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing and use the nearest waste receptacle to dispose of it after use. If you do not have a disposable tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wash or sanitize your hands frequently – after coughing, before preparing food or eating, after toilet use, after contact with ill persons, and during exposure to high traffic public areas.

HEALTHCARE FOR MEETING PARTICIPANTS

For respiratory illness: A participant who is unwell with fever, cough or other respiratory symptoms is most likely to have a more common illness – the common cold or even influenza – not COVID-19. In the unlikely event that they have fever, cough or respiratory symptoms AND have been to a high-risk location or cared for someone with COVID-19, they may be considered a suspect COVID-19 case. As preparation for the meeting, the organizers should remind all participants of where to obtain medical service in the duty station or location of the meeting should they become unwell and to ensure to have the necessary medical insurance available for such services.



If a participant is unwell in the meeting room: Organizers should prepare a standard operation procedure of what to do if a participant become unwell in the meeting room. This should include how to coordinate getting access to medical care for the participants, as well as any necessary clean up in the meeting room. They should develop their procedures in accordance with local health authorities and WHO country office advice.

For medical emergencies: Organizers should be prepared to link participant with paramedics, and other emergency responders.

For all other medical care: Organizers should either advise participants who are unwell for any reason to go to a local urgent care clinic or help to organize transfer with local paramedic for an emergency.

LOGISTICS CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEETING ORGANISERS

The following provide some suggestions of key elements to implement before and during a meeting. Organizers should adapt this in accordance with local health authorities and WHO country office advice.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Organizers should

- Distribute the 'Advice for Meeting participants' package (including the accompanying brochures).
- Seek the most current guidance from local health authorities and WHO country office.
- Develop a video teleconferencing (VTC) capability – both for participants and presenters who cannot attend in person.
- Speak with Facilities Management regarding cleaning and the availability of hand sanitizer.
- Remind participants to have a plan of what to do if they become ill during the meeting and to ensure medical insurance coverage during the meeting.

DURING THE MEETING

Organizers should

- Provide an introductory brief (see example below).
- Provide more than enough copies of the COVID-19 brochures in the meeting room.
- Provide copies of the 'Advice for Meeting Participants'.
- Make sure that there is a clear plan of what to do in case participants become unwell – either in the meeting or out of hours.

EXAMPLE : INTRODUCTORY BRIEF FOR THE CHAIR

We suggest something along these lines:

“As you are aware, the World Health Organization has declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. While the emphasis of this decision is on global measures to control the outbreak, individuals can contribute by following the advice to ‘think global, act local’. I urge all attendees to follow the guidance provided by us as hosts of this meeting, which include:

- *Strictly not attending the meeting if you are unwell, have a fever, cough or respiratory symptoms.*
- *Contacting and informing us immediately or by telephone if you are unwell AND have been to an ‘at risk’ location for coronavirus in the last 14 days; and*
- *Undertaking regular preventive measures as described in the brochures provided on the desks.*

These measures are for your safety, and to safeguard the wellbeing of us all.”



FAQ'S FOR MEETING ORGANIZERS

A person with an important role or presentation to make is unwell. What should we do?

The presenter should not attend the meeting. Organizers should ensure there is a mechanism for a videoconference link to allow presenters to stay away but still deliver their information remotely.

A participant is coughing and unwell. What should we do?

The first step is for all other participants to keep their distance. If appropriate, encourage the person to avoid others and to seek advice from a healthcare provider.

A participant is coughing and unwell AND has recently been in a high risk country. What do we do?

If you believe that there is a risk to the other participants, inform the unwell person of the need for a medical assessment. Provide all necessary support to ensure that the participant has access to paramedics, local health facilities or duty station clinic that will conduct a risk assessment to determine the next steps.

In the event that someone should be 'quarantined', what does this mean?

This really means 3 key things in practice. The person should:

- Avoid contacts by staying in their accommodation and keeping at least 1 m / 3 feet away from others.
- Minimize the spread of virus particles by covering coughs, cleaning surfaces and washing or sanitizing hands regularly.
- Seek care or advice by phone first – *before* seeing a healthcare provider in person.

Will there be hand sanitizer available?

Generally, yes. Organizers should specifically request Facilities Management to ensure that hand sanitizer is available.

Should participants who are well and free from respiratory symptoms wear face masks?

No. There is no evidence that masks are of benefit to those who are well and free of respiratory symptoms. We discourage their use for well persons, except if this is a mandatory requirement by the host country authorities, Masks may even increase spread of the virus because they are touched/adjusted so often.

Is there other information available?

Yes. The information provided in this brief is enough to manage most concerns. However, for further information, we advise that you refer only to reputable and up to date sources. We encourage you to review the 'Travel Advice' and 'Protect Yourself' sections in the World Health Organization website which is constantly updated to reflect the most recent information.

WHO COVID-19 Webpage - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

UN COVID-19 Staff Webpage - <https://hr.un.org/page/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>