Tri-County Health Department Provisional Guidance for Large Gatherings During the Coronavirus Pandemic (March 13, 2020)

Due to the rapidly changing nature of this pandemic, Tri-County Health Department may modify or update this guidance based on new information at any time.

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) is taking steps to protect the health of our community by issuing strong guidance for large gatherings, including situations that warrant the cancellation of large gatherings, and by providing additional recommendations that will slow the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in our community, reduce the number of people infected, and especially protect those who are most vulnerable to severe illness. We understand that these recommendations, and potential event cancellations, may have a tremendous impact on the lives of people in our communities. TCHD is taking these steps in consultation with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and using guidance provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), based on the best information we have at this time to protect the public’s health.

We are actively trying to scale up testing efforts for individuals experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, so that we can more effectively identify the true burden of this virus on our communities. While testing thus far has been insufficient to draw firm conclusions, we believe that it is likely that there is ongoing community transmission in the counties in TCHD’s jurisdiction, including Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties. Community transmission is evidenced by cases with no known exposure through travel or through contact with a known infected person.

Provisional Guidance for Planners of Large Events

Given our likely ongoing community transmission, limiting large gatherings is critical to successfully slowing the spread of the disease. Thus we are now recommending that large, special events (e.g., races, festivals, concerts, etc. where large numbers of people will gather) should be cancelled. At this point, to be consistent with current guidance from the Governor, we are advising that the threshold for cancellation are events where more than 250 attendees are expected.

A “large gathering” is any event or convening that brings together 250 or more people in a single room or single space at the same time, such as an auditorium, stadium, arena, large conference room, meeting hall, cafeteria, theater, or any other confined indoor or confined outdoor space.

A “large gathering” does not include normal operations at airports, shopping malls and centers, or other spaces where 250 or more persons may be in transit. It also does not include typical office environments or retail or grocery stores where large numbers of people are present, but where it is unusual for them to be within arm’s length of one another.

Cancellation of regular, day-to-day business events (e.g., dance classes, meetings, etc.) is not required in this context; however, organizations should consider how important it is that the activity continue and
whether it could be halted for a few months, as well as strategies to minimize exposure, such as providing services remotely and assuring social distancing. We will work with businesses and other partners to identify and support strategies that minimize exposure during day-to-day business.

Events with more than 250 attendees are advised to cancel the event.

If planners of such events feel they cannot be canceled it is their responsibility to take the following steps to mitigate risks.

- Strongly discourage anyone who is sick with fever or respiratory symptoms from attending.
- Encourage those who are at higher risk for serious illness (those over 60, persons with underlying medical problems) to not attend.
- Find ways to give people more physical space so that they are not in so close contact as much as possible.
- Ensure that there are adequate supplies of hand hygiene materials and urge attendees to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used.
- Direct attendees to:
  - Avoid close contact with people
  - Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth
  - Cover their cough or sneeze with a tissue – if available – or into their elbow.
- Clean surfaces with disinfecting wipes and other standard cleaners before, during, and after the event.

Provisional Guidance for Workplaces and Businesses

Employers are responsible for taking steps to make it more feasible for their employees to work in ways that minimize close contact with large numbers of people. This guidance is designed to both protect employees and all members of the public with whom they come into contact at work.

Employers should immediately:

- Ensure employees who are sick do not come to work.
- Suspend nonessential employee travel.
- Minimize the number of employees working within arm’s length of one another.
- Cancel all large-in-person meetings and conferences, or hold them via telephone or video conference.
- Maximize the flexibility in granting paid sick leave so that sick employees are able to stay home.
- For service/retail industries, ensure updated procedures and protocols for frequent handwashing/sanitizing; enhance cleaning of high-touch surfaces and items with disinfecting wipes and other standard cleaners; ensure adequate supply of soap and paper towels; ensure frequent emptying of waste bins; and post signage regarding these procedures for staff and patrons.
• Stop requiring a doctor’s note for sick employees, as healthcare offices may be very busy and unable to provide that documentation right away.
• Consider using telecommuting options for appropriate employees.
• Consider staggering start and end times to reduce large numbers of people coming together at the same time.