



No. SO (EP&C) 1-8/2020
GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB
PRIMARY & SECONDARY HEALTHCARE
DEPARTMENT

Dated Lahore the 10th Oct, 2020

To

All Administrative Secretaries to Government of the Punjab
All Commissioners in the Punjab
All Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab
All Heads/CEOs of Autonomous/Semi-Autonomous Bodies in the Punjab
All Chief Executive Officers, District Health Authorities in the Punjab

Subject: **SOPs TO PREVENT COVID-19 SPREAD IN MASS/PUBLIC GATHERINGS**

Mass gatherings are events characterized by the concentration of people at a specific location for a specific purpose over a set period of time that have the potential to strain the planning and response resources of the country/province/state. These may include public processions, religious meetings, cultural festivals, sport events, exhibitions, family events, professional conferences, seminars, official meetings, political movements, rallies and protests/sit-ins. Mass gatherings can include a single event or a combination of several events at different venues. In the context of COVID-19, mass gatherings are events that could amplify the transmission of the virus and potentially disrupt the country's response capacity. COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person through respiratory droplets and contact with contaminated surfaces, and the risk of transmission appears to be proportional to the closeness (less than 1 meter) and frequency of the interaction between an infected individual and an individual who is not infected.

2. Mass gatherings are not merely recreational events; they have important implications on the psychological well-being of large number of individuals e.g. religious events; they can also play an important role in promoting healthy behaviors e.g. sports; they can provide employment for a great number of people and could leave a legacy of improved assets or capacities developed as a result of hosting a mass gathering event. Since mass gatherings have substantial political, cultural, social, and economic implications, but such pro-crowd activities increase COVID-19

transmission risk manifolds thereby warranting the need for stringent set of Standard Operating Procedures. In this background, on recommendation by Technical Working group on COVID-19, Primary & Secondary Healthcare Department is pleased to issue following SOPs to prevent COVID-19 while organizing/dealing with public gatherings:-

a. **Categorization of Gatherings.** Public gathering means assembly of more than 50 persons at one place and time indoor or outdoor, for purposes such as cultural events, religious events, sports, entertainment, parties, political gathering, professional conferences, processions, walks, rallies, etc. Gatherings are categorized on the basis of COVID-19 spread risk, crowd management and violation of social distancing SOPs.

- (1) **Very High Risk Gathering.** The gathering with uncertain profile and behaviors of participants is categorized as very high risk gathering. Under such condition crowd control is difficult. People may act under very high enthusiasm e.g. political movements, public rallies, Urs (memorial events), processions, religious gathering other than prayers, etc.
- (2) **High Risk Gathering.** The gathering where crowd is under semi control condition is categorized as high risk gathering. For these events time, venue and duration is limited e.g. religious gathering (prayers assembly), marriage ceremonies, cultural events, sport events, awareness walks, etc.
- (3) **Medium Risk Gathering.** The gathering where participation is under control condition. Participants would have some professional background and can understand COVID-19 SOPs easily e.g. professional conferences, academic exhibitions, seminars, etc.
- (4) **Low Risk Gathering.** The gathering where participation and crowd management are under full control. Participants are trained on COVID-19 SOPs and realize official obligations to comply with the precautions e.g. official meetings, training sessions, academic classes etc.



b. **Administrative Approval for Gathering**

- (1) Any decisions to restrict, modify, postpone, cancel, or proceed with holding a mass gathering should be based on a rigorous risk assessment exercise, tailored to the event. The risk assessment should be undertaken by respective public health authorities and event organizers with input from other relevant authorities (emergencies, transport, safety, security etc.), based on the following considerations: -
 - (a) Normative and epidemiological context in which the event takes place.
 - (b) Evaluation of risk factors associated with the event.
 - (c) Capacity to apply prevention and control measures.
- (2) District Administration will issue case to case basis approval for very high risk gathering on the recommendation of District Health Authority based upon Risk Assessment.
- (3) As a guiding principal, districts where cases are on rise and COVID-19 Test Positivity Rate (CTPR) is above 5%, "very high risk mass gathering" activities will not be allowed.
- (4) All other gathering categories will have umbrella approval under provincial policy unless prohibition is notified by District Administration under required smart or micro smart lock down conditions. However compliance to SOPs will be responsibility of concerned management and District Administration will closely monitor the compliance to SOPs.

c. **Venue and Schedule for Gathering**

- (1) Venue should be selected on the basis of space required i.e. 6 feet/ person.
- (2) Venue should preferably be open spaces for very high risk or high risk activities.
- (3) Indoor venue should be well lit and ventilated.



- (4) Venue for very high to medium risk gathering should be communicated to District Government (Tehsil Office/DDHO Office) for assessment and approval.
- (5) Event schedule for very high risk and high-risk gatherings detailing date and time should be organized after the approval of concerned District Administration.
- (6) District Administration to make sure that there is no parallel event of mass gathering in the vicinity.

d. **Health Conditions of Participants/Attendees**

- (1) Prefer participation under formal invitation and maintain list of invitees, speakers, organizers, staff, etc. for official/scheduled events.
- (2) For rallies, processions and religious/political event where formal invitations are not possible, consider limiting the numbers according to the available space.
- (3) Senior citizens, children and persons with chronic ailments should be discouraged to participate in gathering.
- (4) Persons with influenza like symptoms, fever, cough, etc. should not be allowed to enter in the event/gathering.

e. **Hand Hygiene**

- (1) Provision of hand hygiene facilities (sanitizer with >60% alcohol contents and wash basin with soap) shall be ensured for all types of gatherings. Sufficient stocks of hand sanitizer, soap and washing water shall be maintained at the venue.
- (2) Participants shall be mobilized to practice frequent hand hygiene, especially after touching shared surfaces, coughing or sneezing, before eating and after toilet use.
- (3) Participants shall be mobilized to avoid touching communally exposed surfaces, hand shaking, hugging and touching face, eyes, nose and mouth.



f. **Respiratory Etiquettes**

- (1) Don't cough or sneeze in close gathering or facing towards others.
- (2) Shouting loud and chanting slogans will generate droplets which can contaminate surrounding surfaces and may spread infection. Such activities should be discouraged or use screen/face shield if necessary.
- (3) Use of face mask or covering shall be mandatory for all participants, organizers, staff, speakers, leaders and serving staff. Speakers may opt using face shields in case use of masks is not feasible while delivering speeches. Other option will be to put up screen between participants and stage/speakers to prevent unnecessary interaction.
- (4) Management shall maintain sufficient stock of face masks at the event venue and provide to the participants as per need.
- (5) Mask shall not be shared with any fellow, colleague or other participants.
- (6) Mask must be changed if it is soiled or becomes moist.
- (7) Ensure mask is properly worn by the participants.
- (8) Don't touch mask; if touched, immediately wash or sanitize hands.

g. **Physical (Social) Distancing and Crowd Control**

- (1) Event organizers should make sufficient arrangements to ensure inter-person distance of 6 feet throughout the event. Jumbling up of participants at any point (entry, waiting, seating, walking, standing, exit, eating, meal serving and collections) should be controlled.
- (2) Floor marking, seating marking, queue management, staggered entry and exit, one-way traffic for entry and exit and other possible measures should be taken to ensure social distancing.
- (3) Limit the gathering to essential participants only.
- (4) Consider virtual participation option as well to limit the physical presence in official/formal meetings and seminars.
- (5) Utilize 50% occupancy of total capacity of gathering venue, transport vehicle, waiting area and seating in the hall.



- (6) Observe approved timing of the event and arrange organized dispersal of the participants.
 - (7) Media coverage usually comes with very close interaction of cameramen, media personnel and reporters. Organizers should allocate sufficient space for cameramen, media staff where required distancing among the media personnel can be ensured.
- h. **Environmental Hygiene and Disinfection**
- (1) Ensure cleanliness, adequate waste collection bins, and transportation and disposal arrangements at the gathering venue.
 - (2) Cleaning and wiping with detergent solution is recommend for all surfaces including floor, furniture, doors, windows, etc. The high touch surfaces should be disinfected using disinfectants in recommended concentrations.
 - (3) Toilets and surfaces suspected for COVID-19 contamination should be cleaned with soap and water followed by wiping with freshly prepared 1% sodium hypochlorite solution. (Consult label of sodium hypochlorite solution to prepare 1% solution).
 - (4) Wet dusting should be preferred over dry dusting of furniture, doors, walls, devices, books, etc.
 - (5) Sanitizer tunnels, misting, fogging or sprinkling of disinfectant are useless and may be harmful; thereby such practices should be prohibited.
 - (6) Tool or device sharing is not permissible in gathering. If devices or tools like cellphone, pen/pencil/microphone, megaphone, etc. are shared/ exchanged, immediately wipe them with alcohol swab and sanitize hands.
 - (7) Communal feast, eating and dirking are not encouraged. If meal is served, prefer lunch boxes or table serving by staff over self-serving buffet.
 - (8) Participants should preferably have their own drinking water bottle and should not share with others.



- (9) Venue management should provide chlorinated drinking water and disposable glasses.

i. **Health Screening and Contact Tracing**

- (1) Speakers for the very high risk and high risk gatherings should be COVID-19 test negative maximum 72 hours before the event.
- (2) All entrants should be scanned with thermal scanner to note body temperature and cough or sore throat symptoms.
- (3) Any person having fever and cough may be suffering from COVID-19, thereby such persons should be immediately isolated and referred for medical checkup.
- (4) For formal events, organizers should maintain record of participants at least for 2 weeks after the event. This record will help in contact tracing, in case a person linked to the event is infected with COVID-19.
- (5) If any positive case is identified, DHA will undertake contact tracing exercise and will collect samples as per epidemiological requirements.

j. **COVID-19 SOPs Awareness**

- (1) Gathering organizer should make sufficient arrangements to make the participants aware regarding COVID-19 precautions/ SOPs while they participate.
- (2) COVID-19 precautions/ standard messages should be communicated to the invitees while sending them invitations. Options to print the messages on invitation card, sending SMS/ WhatsApp message etc. should be used.
- (3) COVID-19 SOPs precautions standees and banners should be displayed at gathering venue.
- (4) Live announcements on COVID-19 precautions should be made throughout the gathering/event. Master of ceremony or dedicated person should preferably be assigned for this task.



k. **SOPs Implementation Arrangements**

- (1) Gathering organizer should notify in writing COVID-19 SOPs implementation committee who should be accountable and answerable to the administration.
- (2) Sufficient number of COVID-19 volunteer guards should be identified and assigned the responsibility to facilitate the participants to follow prevention SOPs.
- (3) Gathering organizers should prepare list of participants, facilitators, speakers and organizers and share with District Health Authority when required.
- (4) Ensure display of awareness messages about COVID-19 prevention using steamers, standees at entrance of venue and other suitable places.
- (5) Key messages for display are:
 - (a) No mask no entry.
 - (b) Keep on wearing face mask/covering throughout the event.
 - (c) Observe discipline to maintain social distance of 6 feet throughout the event.
 - (d) Don't handshake or hug.
 - (e) Keep hand sanitizer with you and ensure hand wash/sanitization after touching any communal use surfaces.
 - (f) Don't exchange your cellphones and other personal use items.
- (6) Adequate security arrangements shall be made by the organizers to ensure crowd control and COVID-19 SOPs compliance. Where required assistance may be acquired from District Police Office.

l. **SOPs Implementation Monitoring**

- (1) District Administration and District Health Authority will closely monitor implementation of SOPs.



- (2) Any serious violation of SOPs may immediately be reported to the District Administration by the monitoring teams to take measures including early conclusion of the event.



CAPTAIN (R) MUHAMMAD USMAN
Secretary

No.& Date Even

A copy is forwarded for information and further necessary action to:

1. Minister for SHC&ME and P&SHC Departments Punjab.
2. Chief Secretary, Government of Punjab.
3. Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab, Secretariat
4. Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Punjab.
5. Secretary, SHC&ME Department, Government of Punjab.
6. Secretary Health South Punjab
7. Special Secretaries, SHC&ME and P&SHC Departments
8. Additional Secretaries (Tech), SHC&ME and P&SHC Departments.
9. Director General Health Services, Punjab, Lahore.
10. All Divisional Directors Health Services in Punjab.
11. Master File.