

COVID 19 BRIEFING

26th February 2020

Who is this briefing for

This briefing is for event organisers, to assist their teams when compiling specific assessments and plans.

Instant updates

Ensure that you keep yourself upto date with current government guidance;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

What is COVID-19

Public Health England describes COVID-19 as a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Typical symptoms of coronavirus infection include fever and cough. In some people the illness may progress to severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

COVID-19 is a new disease caused by a recently discovered virus.

How is COVID-19 spread

From what the authorities know, Public Health England states it is most likely spread through close contact (within 2 meters or less) with an infected person. Droplets or aerosols containing the virus are most likely to be the most important means of transport (coughs or sneezes).

2 routes people could become infected;

- Directly transferred into the mouth or nose, or inhaled into the lungs.
- Touching a surface contaminated and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

What is the impact on events/meetings

World Health Organisation guidance for mass gatherings states they can amplify the spread of infectious diseases. Infections can be transmitted during the gathering, during travel to and from the event, and in participants from communities on their return.

What can be done in the planning stage?

Effective planning is essential for all elements of an event, this situation is no different. Consider the following;

- Compile a risk assessment that tracks your decisions, the controls and who is responsible for implementing the control measures.

- The risk assessment should be revised when new WHO or UK Gov advice becomes available.
- Appoint someone within the organisation who is responsible for monitoring information and sharing with team members.
- Establish what your communication channels are with your audience and what message is being relayed regarding this situation.

World Health Organisation states you should consider the following within the assessment;

- Crowd density
- How participants are interacting with each other
- Number of participants coming from countries affected by the COVID-19 outbreak within 14 days prior to the event
- Age and health of participants
- Duration and mode of transport of participants

Action Plan

Should you decide to proceed with the event, ensure you have an action plan specific to COVID-19. This should include;

- What measures will be in place to reduce the potential spread.
- What hand washing facilities are onsite, what can be increased.
- How you are communicating the need for good hygiene to staff and participants.
- How you are communicating HNS advice for people who have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Advice on self monitoring for symptoms and signs for participants traveling from affected countries.
- Advice on self isolation and not attending the event if symptoms develop.
- Who makes decisions relating to changing information and advise.
- What disease surveillance and detection is in place.
- How will you isolate people if they demonstrate signs of COVID-19 whilst onsite
- How you will communicate with NHS and who is responsible for this.
- What would trigger postponement or cancellation.

Operational procedures for reducing event related transmission

- Advise people to stay away from the event if they feel ill.
- Provide options for virtual participation.
- If they feel unwell they should stay at home until symptoms resolve (call NHS).
- Promote appropriate hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitisers and tissues should be easily accessible.
- Isolate people at the event if they become ill.
- Have masks available to help contain people who are being isolated. In addition, medical staff attending persons who are ill should wear a mask, dispose of it immediately after contact with someone who is ill, and cleanse their hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Use distancing measures to reduce close contact among people. You could stagger arrivals, reduce floor space density, divert departures, minimise congestion.

Communications

Ensure that you have effective communications with both staff and event attendees.

As you would with any other communication, ensure you have considered appropriate responses to a range of COVID-19 questions and how you will facilitate the transfer of updated government guidance.

Post-event

After the event, if public health authorities suspect that transmission of the COVID-19 virus has occurred, organisers must support the response of authorities.

- Public ticketed events should share ticket data with local authorities, and staff details.
- Meeting organisers must liaise with public health authorities and facilitate the sharing of information about all symptomatic participants (such as their itineraries, contact information, visa procedures, hotel bookings).
- Public unticketed free events should engage with any information sharing through their social media and communication channels to assist in the speedy flow of information to their audience.

Cancellation

Should you proceed with cancelling your event ensure that there is a thorough action plan for the cancellation including communications and refund policies.

For insurance purposes you need to check if your plan does not explicitly list epidemics and/or communicable diseases as qualifying force majeure circumstances.

In terms of contracts you have in place with contractors, suppliers and partners. Check the terms with your contractors to establish whether acts of God, disease or epidemics are included within the terms.

Staff Considerations

You have a legal responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect employees whilst at work.

If staff travel to mass gatherings or countries/areas where outbreaks have occurred it is essential that an assessment of the risk is undertaken.

If the planned staff travel is not work related (ie holiday) you should direct the employee to government advice on travel and COVID-19 that is relevant at that time.

If you have an employee who is suspected of contracting COVID-19, Public Health England will contact the management team of the company to discuss the case and contact anyone who has been in close proximity.

Basic advice to avoid catching or spreading germs

NHS recommends to help stop viruses spreading;

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
- put used tissues in the bin immediately.
- wash your hands with soap and water often – use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

Do not do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean