



Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, DrPH  
Director

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: Mike North, 209-617-1596

**There are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Merced County.  
To protect public health and slow the rate of transmission of COVID-19, gatherings as described below should be postponed or canceled across the state of California for at least the remainder of the month of March.**

**The California Department of Public Health finds the following:**

- Large gatherings that include 250 people or more should be postponed or canceled.
  - This includes gatherings such as concerts, conferences, and professional, college, and school sporting events.
- Smaller gatherings held in venues that do not allow social distancing of six feet per person should be postponed or canceled.
  - This includes gatherings in crowded auditoriums, rooms or other venues.
- Gatherings of individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 should be limited to no more than 10 people.
  - This includes gatherings such as those at retirement facilities, assisted living facilities, developmental homes, and support groups for people with health conditions.
- A “gathering” is any event or convening that brings together people in a single room or single space at the same time, such as an auditorium, stadium, arena, large conference room, meeting hall, cafeteria, or any other indoor or outdoor space.

This applies to all non-essential professional, social, and community gatherings regardless of their sponsor. Gatherings that do not meet the aforementioned criteria should only be conducted when they are essential—that is, if the activity is essential and could not be postponed or achieved without gathering, meaning that some other means of communication could not be used to conduct the essential function.

Vicki Jones, MPA, REHS  
Environmental Health Division Director

Jessica Montoya-Juarez, MS  
Assistant Public Health Director

Yadira Vazquez, MBA  
Assistant Public Health Director

James Clark, MICP, MHOAC  
EMS Administrator

## What will this achieve?

The timely implementation of aggressive strategies that create social distance and those that reduce close contact of people not regularly together, including limiting gatherings, has proven effective in prior pandemics at delaying rates of transmission and reducing illness and death.

By decreasing the prevalence of disease across California we will:

- Reduce the number of Californians who contract COVID-19 before an effective treatment or vaccine is available.
- Protect those most likely to experience severe symptoms, such as older Californians and those with underlying chronic conditions.
- Preserve and protect our health care delivery system, including our health care workforce, so they can care for the least healthy individuals in the community for any medical condition, not just COVID-19.
- Minimize the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 over the long run.

## How long will these limitations apply?

This guidance will remain in place at least through the month of March. As with all guidance that relates to COVID-19 response, authorities will revisit this guidance on a regular basis to evaluate the continued public health need for it and to evaluate if any elements need to be changed. To stay informed, continue to monitor this link:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Guidance.aspx>

## What is Social Distancing and how is it achieved?

Social distancing is a practice recommended by public health officials to stop or slow down the spread of contagious diseases. It requires the creation of physical space between individuals who may spread certain infectious diseases. The key is to minimize the number of gatherings as much as possible and to achieve space between individuals when events or activities cannot be modified, postponed, or canceled.

Although the Department expects most events with more than 250 attendees to be postponed or canceled, we emphasize that the venue space does matter. Achieving space between individuals of approximately six feet is advisable. Additionally, there is a particular focus on creating space between individuals who have come together on a one-time or rare basis and who have very different travel patterns such as those coming from multiple countries, states or counties.

## What can be done to a make a gathering safer if it is essential or small?

- Stagger activities.
- Add frequency of an event to spread out attendance, e.g. hold more, smaller gatherings.
- Add distance between where individuals sit or stand around tables.
- Add additional hand washing stations and restrooms.
- Limit the number of people in lines.
- Avoid direct physical contact, such as hand-shaking, holding hands, and hugging.
- Extend hours to allow for staggering of attendance or participation.
- Use phones, videos or video conferencing to reduce the need for close interactions.
- Consider ways to encourage anyone with fever and respiratory symptoms to stay home when sick, such as
  - Offering refunds or support reselling of tickets for persons who become ill.
  - Placing messages on websites, tickets, and venue entrances reminding people to protect one another by staying home if sick.

## Examples of Essential Events this Does Not Apply To

The goal of this recommendation is to prevent people physically coming together unnecessarily, where people who have the infection can easily spread it to others. This guidance does not apply to activities such as attendance at regular school classes, work, or essential services.

Please see the [guidance for schools](#) document for additional information.

Certain activities are essential to the functioning of our state and must continue. Hence, this does not apply to essential public transportation, airport travel, or shopping at a store or mall. Other [specific guidance](#) can be found on the CDPH website to help people take actions that can protect them in those settings.

This does not apply to congregate living situations, including dormitories and homeless encampments. For more information on what can be done to protect homeless individuals, please see the [Guidance for Homeless Assistance Providers on Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(PDF\)](#).

**PLEASE NOTE:** This is an evolving situation. More information will be distributed as it becomes available. For the most up to date information, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>  
Additional information is available at [www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus](http://www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus).