Tips and Frequently Asked Questions for Gatherings

UPDATED March 18, 2021

ALERT: Remain Cautious

In alignment with the State’s recommendations, San Francisco is reopening at the State’s Red Tier starting March 3, 2021. The decision to reopen balances the public health risks of COVID-19 transmission with the public health risks of economic and mental health stress.

Even though COVID-19 case rates have come down, there remains a risk that people who you come into contact with may have COVID-19. Most COVID-19 infections are caused by people who have no symptoms of illness. We also have confirmed there are new, more contagious virus variants in the San Francisco Bay Area and that some of these variants are more likely to cause serious illness and death in unvaccinated people. The opening of sectors does not necessarily signify that these activities are “safe.”

We have made our best efforts to create guidance to help these activities and sectors provide safer environments for workers and the public. However, this requires that everyone do their part to make these activities as safe as possible, including wearing masks that covers your mouth and nose especially when talking, avoiding indoor settings to the extent possible, maintaining at least 6 feet distance from those you don’t live with, avoiding get-togethers and gatherings to the extent possible, if you must gather minimize the amount of time you spend with people you don't live, getting tested and isolating if you are ill, and complying with additional health protocols required of open businesses. People at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 — such as unvaccinated older adults and unvaccinated people with health risks — and those who live with or care for them are urged to defer participating at this time in activities with other people outside their household where taking protective measures of wearing face masks and social distancing may be difficult, especially indoors or in crowded spaces.

AUDIENCE: Hosts, organizers and participants of gatherings of people from more than one household. This information does not apply to gatherings of people living together in a single household.

BACKGROUND: San Francisco Health Directives allow people in different households to gather, with restrictions to prevent spread of COVID-19. This tip sheet cover frequently asked questions about how to safely organize, host, and participate in gatherings of people from different households.

The Directives and associated documents are available on the Health Directives page under Gatherings.

- Directive 2020-19 – Outdoor Gatherings
- Directive 2020-28 – Drive-In Gatherings
- Directive 2020-34 – Indoor Worship

Additional guidance can be found at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19.

If you have received the COVID-19 vaccine, please read more about safer social interactions at: www.sfcdcp.org/lifeaftervaccine
Overview of Types of Gatherings

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Frequently Asked Questions

How Does COVID-19 Spread?

Our current understanding is that COVID-19 is mostly spread from person-to-person in the air through virus-containing droplets in the breath of someone with COVID-19. These respiratory droplets enter the air when a person breathes. Even more droplets can get in the air when infected people talk, sing, cough, or sneeze. People with COVID-19 may have no symptoms and can still be breathing out virus-containing droplets that can infect others. Transmission can occur through:

- Larger droplets. These larger droplets are sometimes called “ballistic droplets” because they travel in straight lines and are pulled down by gravity. People nearby, usually within 6 feet, are infected when they breathe in these droplets or if the droplets land in their eyes, nose, or mouth.

- Smaller droplets or infectious particles. These can float in the air for a period of time and/or travel beyond 6 feet on indoor air currents, especially in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation. People sharing the same space are infected when they breathe in these smaller droplets and particles or the droplets or particles land on their eyes, nose, or mouth – even if they are further than 6 feet away. These droplets are sometimes referred to as “aerosols” or “bioaerosols”.

Changes to this FAQ since the March 3 Version:

- Refer to the Business Capacities and Activities Table or BCAT (English, Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Russian) for all current restrictions, limitations and suspensions: any changes made on the Table override the conflicting information in this document.

- Added link on safer social interactions after being vaccinated
COVID-19 can also spread if a person touches their eyes, nose or mouth after touching a contaminated surface (also known as a fomite transmission); however, this is less common.

**Monitor Your Health Daily.** Be alert of symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, stay home, and get tested.

**How can we help slow the spread of COVID-19?**

**CA Notify – another way for us to stop the spread**

CA Notify (canotify.ca.gov) is an app you can add on your smartphone. It uses Bluetooth technology to recognize when you and your phone have been in close proximity to others infected with COVID-19 to help stop the spread of the virus in our community.

If you are using CA Notify and you test positive, your diagnosis will not be shared with others. However, if other people in close contact with you are also enrolled in the app, they will be told they had an exposure. They will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity.

If you are using CA Notify and you were exposed to someone who tested positive and they entered their result into the app, you will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity.

CA Notify is available through Apple and Google. See canotify.ca.gov for more information.

**What do we know about the COVID-19 Vaccine?**

The vaccine is one of the most important ways to end the pandemic. The FDA, CDC as well as California’s own Scientific Safety Review Workgroup have reviewed all data from clinical trials to ensure the safety and effectiveness of all COVID-19 vaccines. **Strongly encourage all personnel to get vaccinated.** Although the first vaccines that were available are estimated to be about 95% effective in preventing sickness from COVID-19 when someone is infected, we do not know how common it is for vaccinated people to get the virus and spread COVID-19 to others. Those who have received the COVID-19 vaccine are probably less likely to get COVID-19, but it is not guaranteed. Therefore, it is still very important for those who are vaccinated, and for the rest of the population who waits for their vaccines, to continue using all the tools available to help stop this pandemic: wearing a mask that covers your mouth and nose when outside your home, avoiding gatherings, avoiding being indoors with people you don't live with, staying at least 6 feet away from others, and washing your hands often. Find out more about the vaccine, including where and when to get it at: sf.gov/covidvax

**How can I stay as safe as possible at a gathering?**

- Wear a face covering or mask at all times. A face covering is required at all gatherings outside the house.
- Stay for a shorter period of time. The less time you spend with people you don’t live with, the safer it is.
- Stay 6 feet away from people outside your household.
- Avoid activities or sports unless you can stay 6 feet away from people outside your household. Sports and exercise are higher risk because people produce more respiratory droplets when they are breathing
harder. If you’re going to engage in sports with people outside your household, you must follow all applicable guidance including the stay at safe home order C19-07 and directive 2021-01.

- Stay away from activities like singing, chanting, shouting, and playing wind or brass instruments. These activities produce many more respiratory droplets, increasing the risk of COVID-19. If you must participate in or be near people who are singing, changing, shouting or playing wind instruments, see “How can singing, chanting, shouting, and playing wind/brass instruments be done more safely?”

- Wash or sanitize your hands frequently. Bring your own hand sanitizer to gatherings where there will be no place to wash or sanitize your hands.

- Consider staying home if you are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 due to your age or medical conditions. See https://www.sfcdcp.org/vulnerable for a list of groups at higher risk.

- Keep others safe: don’t attend if you are or a family member feels ill or has COVID-19 like symptoms. For a list of symptoms, see http://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/covid-guidance/covid-screening.pdf

- People at risk for severe illness with COVID-19, such as unvaccinated older adults and unvaccinated people with certain medical conditions, as well as those who live or care for them are strongly discouraged from participating in activities with other people outside their household where taking protective measures of wearing face masks and social distancing may be difficult, especially indoors or in crowded spaces.

- Get a flu vaccine. Preventing influenza is especially important during the COVID-19 epidemic because people who have flu and COVID-19 at the same time much more likely to die.

**As a business or organization hosting a gathering, what must I do?**

- Complete, maintain, and implement the following documents:

  - A Health and Safety Plan for the type of gathering, including COVID-19 screening for all personnel (www.sfcdcp.org/screening-handout) and participants (www.sfcdcp.org/screeningvisitors). The Health and Safety Plan must be provided to Host Personnel, available to participants, and posted at the physical entrance where the Host operates. See www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus-health-directives.asp to find the correct link for your gathering.

  - A SFDPH Social Distancing Protocol including a plan to clean and disinfect high touch surfaces such as seating, doors, and others before each Gathering (see SFDPH Cleaning/Disinfection Guidance, posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covidcleaning).

  - Signage on reporting violations of COVID-19 Health Orders. Beginning on Nov. 10, Host Businesses or organizations are required to post signs in employee break rooms or areas informing employees of the right to report violations of COVID-19 health orders and directives by calling 311 or visiting www.sf.gov/report-health-order-violation. Signage needs to state that employee’s identity will remain anonymous. Sample signage is available online at https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19.

  - Keep a record of people at your gathering, in case someone is later found to have COVID-19. People with COVID-19 can infect others up to 2 days before they develop symptoms or test positive. Hosts must help public health authorities in contact tracing efforts in case an attendee develops COVID-19. We can help prevent COVID-19 transmission by contact tracing which helps identify people who may have been exposed and helping them quarantine so they don’t inadvertently spread the disease.
• Keep the attendance/schedules of all personnel at your organization for up to three weeks.

• Consider maintaining a list of participants willing to voluntarily provide their names for three weeks after an event. Any lists should be discarded after three weeks (unless your business keeps such records in the ordinary course of business).

• Try to maintain an up-to-date contact list to alert attendees in the event of potential exposure.

• For more information, see https://covid19.ca.gov/contact-tracing.

• Follow SFDPH’s guidelines on “COVID-19 Positive At Workplace” if someone at your gathering tests positive for COVID-19.

If you are hosting an Indoor Religious/Cultural Gathering, you must adhere to the changes made on the Business Capacities and Activities Table (BCAT) as well as:

• **Post signs about the increased risk of COVID-19 indoors.** Post SFDPH Approved Signage, stating:
  o That COVID-19 is transmitted through the air and that indoor settings carry a much higher risk of infection.
  o That seniors and those with health risks should avoid indoor settings with crowds.
  o The maximum capacity of the space and the maximum capacity currently permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order.

• Post Ventilation signage at public entrances and all break rooms indicating which of the following systems are used:
  - All available windows and doors accessible to fresh outdoor air are kept open
  - Fully operational HVAC systems
  - Appropriately sized portable air cleaners in each room
  - None of the above

• **Ensure that indoor spaces are well-ventilated.**  
  *Good ventilation controls droplets and infectious particles to prevent COVID-19 transmission by:*
  - removing air containing droplets and particles from the room;
  - diluting the concentration of droplets and particles by adding fresh, uncontaminated air;
  - filtering room air, removing droplets and particles from the air.

• Comply with the ventilation protocols laid out at Section 4.i of the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order, including to review and follow SFDPH’s Ventilation Guidance.

• Implement as many improvements in the Ventilation Guidance as feasible. Keep a hand-annotated copy of the Ventilation Guidance showing which specific improvements were considered and implemented.

• Make any necessary improvements to the ventilation of the establishment, including:
  - Increase natural ventilation by opening windows and doors when environmental conditions allow and if permitted by fire and building safety requirements. Fire doors should not be wedged or propped open.

    ▪ **Doors and Windows** required to be kept closed for fire/life safety purposes are exempt. For example, fire doors must remain closed. Make sure open windows do not
create falling hazards especially for children.

- If an HVAC system is present:
  - Ensure HVAC systems are serviced and functioning properly.
  - Evaluate possibilities for upgrading air filters to the highest efficiency possible.
  - Increase the percentage of outdoor air through the HVAC system, readjusting or overriding recirculation ("economizer") dampers.
  - Disable demand-control ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.
  - Evaluate running the building ventilation system even when the building is unoccupied to maximize ventilation. At the minimum, reset timer-operated ventilation systems so that they start operating 1-2 hours before the building opens and 2-3 hours after the building is closed.

- Consider installing portable air cleaners ("HEPA filters").

- If the establishment uses pedestal fans or hard mounted fans, adjust the direction of fans to minimize air blowing from one individual’s space to another’s space.

- For more information and additional resources, please see the following: San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH): [www.sfcdcp.org/COVID-ventilation](http://www.sfcdcp.org/COVID-ventilation).

- **Singing, chanting, shouting, and wind instruments are NOT permitted at indoor gatherings of any type in San Francisco.**

**As a host/organizer, how else can I keep our gathering as safe as possible?**

- Limit the duration of your gathering to the shortest time possible, even if it is outdoors. The shorter it is, the safer it is.

- Avoid high-risk activities such as singing, chanting, shouting, and playing wind or brass instruments, even outdoors. The activities produce large numbers of respiratory droplets, increasing the risk of COVID-19. See more under “How can singing, chanting, shouting, and playing wind/brass instruments be done more safely?”

- Promote flu vaccination. Flu vaccines are critical in the fight against COVID-19 by (1) keeping workers and communities healthy and (2) reducing strain on our healthcare and testing systems that are responding to COVID-19. Post signage to encourage flu vaccine among personnel and participants. Find out more information at [http://sfcdcp.org/flu](http://sfcdcp.org/flu).

**What else can I do to decrease the risk of our indoor gathering?**

In addition to the measures laid out in “How can I keep a gathering as safe as possible?”

- Make sure that personnel and participants are aware that indoor gatherings are much higher risk for COVID-19 than outdoor gatherings, so they can decide if they can safely attend.

- Consider making changes to minimize crowding and make physical distancing easier for people from different households. Examples include moving podiums, creating physical barriers, taping off or moving...
seating, identifying entrance and exits, indicating walking paths in areas where participants pray or kneel on the floor, prohibiting access to common areas.

- Make changes to minimize touching of high-touch surfaces, for example, by keeping bathroom doors propped open to minimize touching of door handles.
- Make hand sanitizer or handwashing stations available at entrances and exits.
- Discontinue use of shared water vessels, fonts, fountain, and sinks for ceremonial purposes.
- Regularly clean and disinfect common and high touch areas, including bathrooms.

**Can I host more than one gathering on the same day?**
Yes, as long as you schedule gatherings far enough apart that participants from different gatherings do not mix, and you can clean/disinfect high-touch areas between gatherings.

- Hosts must separate outdoor gatherings by at least 20 minutes and indoor gatherings by 30 minutes between gatherings, to allow time for participants to exit and for personnel to clean/disinfect.
- Between gatherings, personnel must:
  - Clean and sanitize high-touch surface;
  - Clean, sanitize and/or replace any items of clothing that became soiled or contaminated with bodily fluids before using them for a later fathering;
  - Thoroughly wash or sanitize their hands.
- Hosts may not hold more than one Outdoor Gathering at a single location at the same time.
- Hosts may not hold both indoor and outdoor gatherings simultaneously to allow for more people to attend a gathering (e.g. indoor and outdoor wedding or funeral).

**Can I hold more than one indoor worship or cultural ceremonial gatherings at the same time in a large facility?**
Yes, you may hold simultaneous or overlapping indoor gatherings if all of the following conditions are met:

- Each gathering must be held in its own, physically separate space, either in different buildings, or in different rooms separated by sealed floor-to-ceiling walls. Partitions may not be used to divide an indoor space for two different gatherings.
- Participants from different gatherings are not allowed to mix.
- Different gatherings must use separate entrances and exits. If only one shared entrance and exit exist, the Host must ensure participants from different gatherings do not enter or exit at the same time, for example, by staggering start and end times.
- Personnel and participants must not move between gatherings.
- The host must develop a written plan to describe how they will keep people in different gatherings from mixing, as outlined in Section 4.1.3 of the Indoor Worship Directive.
- In general, keep the areas that are not reserved for an indoor gathering closed to participants, unless expressly permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order.
Can personnel who are not involved in a gathering work on-site while a gathering is taking place?
Yes. Personnel are allowed to work inside the facility while multiple indoor gatherings occur as long as staff follow rules for the Business Operating Office Facilities Directive and Stay-Safer-At-Home Order.

Can we eat or drink at gatherings?
Yes, in some cases. Eating and drinking are permitted at Outdoor Meal Gatherings, at Drive-In Gatherings, and as part of Religious or Faith-based Ceremonies, as long as it is done in a way that minimizes the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

- Eating and drinking may not take place when personnel and/or participants are within 6 feet of one another, since face coverings must be worn when people are within 6 feet.
- Avoid hand-to-mouth contact between different people. Respiratory droplets from one person’s mouth can land on the other person’s hand, increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- As an example, communion rituals could have the priest and participants masked at all times, with the participants receiving communion in the hand and moving away from others to briefly lower their mask to place the sacramental bread on the tongue (see example video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8tg8A5jmP0).
- People from different households should not drink out of the same glass or cup. They also should not share utensils. If glasses, cups, or utensils are shared, they must be disinfected between households, and anyone handling the shared item must also wash or disinfect their hands.
- Self-service food, potlucks, or family-style eating with shared serving plates or drink dispensers are not allowed.

Must we wear masks/face coverings all the time?
- You must wear masks as specified in the Face Covering Order.
- Proper use of face coverings is even more critical when in higher risk gatherings, such as indoors.
- Face coverings may be removed briefly while eating or drinking, however proper social distancing should be maintained. If removing face coverings/masks is deemed as essential in a ritual or ceremony, a person may briefly remove their face covering only if they (1) maintain social distance and do not speak, recite, chant, shout or sing; or (2) isolate themselves from all other people to speak or recite, such as by speaking inside an enclosed chamber or behind a plastic or glass partition or face shield no more than 12 inches from the mouth of the speaker and greater than 12 feet away from others.

What about camping, cookouts, or BBQs?
- Bring your own supplies including soap, disinfectants, hand sanitizer, paper towels, etc.
- Do not share BBQs or outdoor grilling stations with people outside of your household. Clean all stations frequently.
- If camping with people from outside your household, consider self-isolating for 14 days before and after if you will be in close contact with people you are camping with.
- “Close contact” is defined by the CDC as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total
of 15 minutes over 24 hours) starting from 2 days before the illness starts (for people without symptoms, this means 2 days before they were tested; www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact).

**Can we sing, chant, shout, or play wind instruments at our gathering?**

Outdoor Special Gatherings and Drive-In Gatherings may have singing, chanting, shouting or wind instruments, if all of the following conditions are met:

- **Only 1 performer** may sing, chant, shout, or play a wind instrument at any given time.
  - The person performing the voice/wind activity must be at least **12 feet** from any other person.
  - The person singing, chanting, or shouting must wear a Face Covering at all times.
  - The wind instrument’s bells and/or openings where air/sound exit must be covered with a mask/other fabric at all times.
  - Group singing, chanting, shouting, or wind instrument playing is **not** allowed.

- **When these activities are allowed**, consider the following to reduce risk:
  - Ensure the performance is in a large, well ventilated area (see [www.sfcdcp.org/COVID-ventilation](https://www.sfcdcp.org/COVID-ventilation)).
  - Minimize the amount of time engaged in these activities.
  - Consider using amplifiers to be able to sing, chant, yell, or play wind instruments more quietly, producing fewer respiratory droplets.
  - Consider a physical barrier between the performer and others.
  - Have performers position themselves so that voices and air exiting from instruments is directed from Participants (for example, in silhouette).
  - Encourage performers to get tested for COVID-19 as close to the performance date as possible, accounting for the turnaround time for the test. People can get tested by their regular healthcare provider or at CityTestSF ([https://sf.gov/citytestsf](https://sf.gov/citytestsf)).
  - Take special care to ensure that performers do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and are not “close contact” of someone with COVID-19. See [www.sfcdcp.org/screeningvisitors](https://www.sfcdcp.org/screeningvisitors).
  - For wind/brass instruments:
    - Performers must be masked at all times as much as possible when not performing.
    - Instruments must not be shared among individuals of different households.
    - If relevant to the instrument, performers should use a large, thin, plastic-lined pad on their chest and lap to collect spit.

- **For Drive-In Gatherings**, up to **6 performers** may perform, however only 1 may sing, chant, shout, or play a wind instrument. For example, 5 people in a 6-person band may play string and percussion instruments 6 feet from each other, with the 6th band member singing or playing a wind instrument, following the guidance above.
At a drive-in gathering, can the host sell food and drinks to the audience?

Host may sell food and drinks to audience in a drive-in gathering. DPH recommends that food and drinks be ordered online and delivered directly to the vehicles. In-person purchase and pickup of food and drinks may be allowed if the host can:

- Set up a separate designated space for in-person purchases;
- Use signage and physical barriers (such as tape, ropes, marks) as well as develop a metering system to ensure patrons and Personnel can maintain six feet of physical distancing at all times;
  - A metering system can be as simple as designating time slots for vehicles from different groups to pick up food and drinks.
- Ensure patrons do not eat or drink around the designated space, do not gather or queue outside the designated area, and immediately return to their vehicles after picking up their items.
- Please follow the guidelines outlined in the Directive 2020-28 for key restrictions.

Resources

Useful COVID-19 Resources to keep checking:

- San Francisco guidance: [www.sfcdcp.org/covid19](http://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19)
- Printable resources such as signage: [https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19](https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19)
- Religious Schools for Youth and Daycare Arrangement at House of Worship guidelines:
  - [2020-14-Guidance-Childcare.pdf](http://sfph.org)
  - [Reopening TK-12 Schools for In-Person Instruction Interim Guidance for School Year 2020-2021](http://sfph.org)
- California guidance:
  - [https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/](https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/)