



Office of the Secretary of Higher Education

Considerations for Postsecondary Commencement Ceremonies Last Updated: April 26, 2021

To celebrate commencement amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, institutions of higher education should plan for multiple scenarios in order to select the ceremony type that best fits institutional needs and context, and comports with the required level of social distancing, masking and other public health measures that may be in place at the time of the event. The decision to host commencement and related activities is ultimately up to institutions, which must ensure their plans comply with state-mandated requirements for indoor and outdoor gatherings and social distancing as stated below.

Institutions must remain flexible to adapt to changing conditions. Institutions should stay current on state and local rules and guidance, as the indoor and outdoor gathering requirements referenced in this document are subject to change. For the most up-to-date COVID-19 information, including gathering capacities, visit New Jersey's [COVID-19 Information Hub](#).

Requirements and considerations for ceremonies:

- For in-person ceremonies, **institutions must limit the number of attendees based on state gathering rules effective on the date of the ceremony.**
 - All venues must follow the indoor/outdoor gathering limits in place at that time as established by [executive order](#). For the most up-to-date indoor and outdoor gathering limits, visit: <https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/reopening-guidance-and-restrictions/how-can-people-safely-get-together-what-are-the-limits-for-indoor-and-outdoor-gatherings>.
 - When planning in-person commencements, institutions should consider developing back-up plans and informing potential attendees that the ceremony may be adapted, pending evolving public health metrics.
 - Institutions may elect to use a large venue with fixed seating capacity, as defined by Executive Order, to host their commencement ceremonies and celebrations. Note the capacity limit for such venues excludes faculty, staff, and graduates, but includes other members of the public. Graduates, faculty, and staff must abide by social distancing requirements.
- Institutions should continue **monitoring local and state health information.**
- Institutions are expected to **prioritize the health and safety** of students, staff, faculty, visitors, and other community members, including abiding by the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance.
 - This includes notifying and keeping local emergency management, law

enforcement, first responders, local elected officials, and local health agencies informed of the institution's planned ceremonies.

- In-person ceremonies **are strongly encouraged to be held outdoors** due to the potential for challenges with social distancing, decreased air flow, and the higher risk of transmission in indoor settings.
- Chairs and other equipment should not be shared, must be sanitized before and after use, and must be spaced at least 6 feet apart.
- Institutions should **be proactive and clear in communicating** event guidelines to those planning to attend. Information could be displayed on digital screens or distributed via e-mail in advance of the ceremony, for example.
 - Institutions should share the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)'s current travel advisories for potential attendees who might be traveling from out-of-state: <https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/travel-and-transportation/are-there-travel-restrictions-to-or-from-new-jersey>.
- Institutions may want to consider dividing into smaller ceremonies held throughout the day or over the span of several days to limit crowds, allow for cleaning in between ceremonies, and to allow the attendees to leave the venue before the next group arrives. This could include, for example, conducting separate ceremonies for different majors, etc.
 - In-person ceremonies will require monitoring of the number of people in attendance. Organizers should consider distributing tickets to students and families in advance of the ceremony or consider digital options and contactless scanners.
- Individuals who are sick should be discouraged from attending – see [CDC guidelines](#) for what individuals should do if they are sick and to see a list of possible COVID-19 symptoms.
- Prospective attendees should be advised to consider current guidelines from the NJDOH and CDC regarding high-risk categories and necessary precautions.
- Require all guests, graduates, and participants to wear face coverings, except when doing so would inhibit the individual's health or with limited exceptions pursuant to [Executive Order 163](#).
- Institutions should provide approved sanitization materials for employees, students, and visitors.
- As always, any event must **be inclusive and accessible for all** students and families.

General Resources

- In developing materials for commencement ceremonies, consider utilizing infographics and resources from the New Jersey Department of Health Community Toolkit available at https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019_toolkit.shtml. The toolkit includes graphics on keeping hands clean and social distancing, among others.
- Consider encouraging all attendees to download and utilize the COVID Alert NJ app. COVID Alert NJ can be downloaded from the [App Store for iPhone users](#) and the [Google Play Store for Android users](#). Visit our website, <http://covid19.nj.gov/app>, to learn more.