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## LIMITING COMMUNITY SPREAD OF COVID-19: GUIDANCE ON ATTENDING AND HOSTING NON-ESSENTIAL LARGE GATHERINGS

### *Overview*

This advisory guidance recommends that Maine residents and organizations avoid attending and hosting **non-essential** large indoor gatherings in the next thirty days (through April 12, 2020). Evidence does not suggest a threshold for what constitutes a “large” gathering. While it may be lower, at the moment, Maine CDC recommends a threshold of 250 or more attendees in a confined space. Given the rapid spread of COVID-19 in the Northeast, suspension of non-essential large group gatherings can help Maine maximize the window of opportunity to limit the potential spread of the virus here.

This recommendation will be re-evaluated in two weeks (by March 26, 2020) to give Maine residents and organizations time to plan. Limiting large gatherings now is proactive and helps Maine continue its preparation for the potential arrival of COVID-19.

### *Rationale*

COVID-19 has achieved community transmission in many states. Community transmission means infections within a population that are not imported from another affected area. When community transmission occurs, social distancing is the key to reducing spread and lowering the peak of any epidemic. Because COVID-19 spreads among people who are in close contact with one another (roughly six feet), suspending large gatherings is an important tool to limit the potential spread of COVID-19. These measures are most effective when implemented **before** a community experiences widespread transmission. These recommendations are in line with the [latest guidance issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

It is important to note that the goal of postponing large gatherings is not necessarily to prevent additional cases from occurring in Maine. Rather, the goals are to delay the onset of potential cases, slow any spread of COVID-19, and reduce the burden on the health care system.

### *Operation*

This policy is a recommendation at this time, and not a legally enforceable regulation. Organizers and attendees of large gatherings should consider several factors that may affect the conditions under which this guidance is applied. For example, organizers and attendees should take into account the average age of the expected attendees, the size of the gathering space, the duration of the event, and the distance between attendees. For example, an outdoor sporting event at a large field poses less risk than a sporting event in a small gymnasium.

Organizers should pay particular attention to gatherings expected to draw older attendees or those who are known to have chronic medical conditions. Organizers should not plan events that will be attended by large numbers of older adults. U.S. CDC’s current guidance for organizations

that serve high-risk populations is to consider suspending events of **more than 10 people**, given that older adults are a high-risk population.

This recommendation does not pertain to the normal school or work day for students or employees. Maine CDC does not currently recommend closing elementary, middle, and high schools, although school administrators should continue to work with the Maine Department of Education to plan for that possibility.

***Re-Evaluation***

This guidance will be re-evaluated by the Coronavirus Response Team (CRT) in 2 weeks from issuance to give stakeholders time to plan for the period beyond April 12, 2020. The CRT will consider the following factors when deciding whether to extend the duration: (1) the COVID-19 case count in Maine; (2) the geographic location of cases; (3) the setting of those cases and whether any are in health care facilities; (4) case counts in adjacent states. Re-issuance of the recommendations would weigh these factors as well as potential drawbacks, including the effect of social isolation on at-risk groups.

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