



State of California—Health and Human  
Services Agency  
**California Department of  
Public Health**



March 26, 2021

**TO:** All Californians

**SUBJECT:** Guidance for the Prevention of COVID-19 Transmission for Commencement/Graduation Ceremonies

## Overview/Introduction

This guidance is intended to provide recommendations to help students, teachers, families, and school administrators celebrate the momentous milestone of graduation while also preventing the spread of COVID-19. School administrators and commencement organizers must identify and monitor the County Risk Level for the county the school is operating in and make required adjustments to their commencement ceremony just as families must adjust their private celebrations. Please note that local health departments can have more restrictive criteria and different closures. Find your county's local information. This guidance will be reassessed on an ongoing basis based on levels of transmission and vaccination in the community and statewide.

NOTE: Commencement ceremonies have a number of operational aspects and service offerings available in other guidance on the Industry Guidance to Reduce Risk website. School and institutions of higher education operators must review this guidance to apply the appropriate protocols to all aspects of their commencement ceremony plans. Such operations may include:

- CDPH K-12 Schools Hub
- Institutes of Higher Education
- Travel Advisory
- Hotels and Lodging (Hotels, Lodging, and Short-Term Rentals guidance)
- Grounds, building maintenance, custodial services (Limited Services guidance)

**Across all Tiers:** All commencement ceremonies must adhere to the following requirements and modifications:

- All attendees, including school staff, performers, students and families are counted toward any occupancy capacity limit.

- If multiple ceremonies are planned for a single day, schools must allow for at least **two hours** between ceremonies to prevent mixing across attendees.
- Limit attendee groups to a household unit. People from the same household do not need to be six feet apart.
- Audience seating must be fixed or marked, with readily identifiable signs to indicate by section, row, and seat. Marked seats should clearly define space for individuals with appropriate space per person (no blanket reservations or group areas).

All commencement ceremonies shall adhere to attendance limitations as defined within the current CDPH Outdoor Seated Live Events and Performances Guidance. Outdoor, in-person ceremonies are permissible, consistent with this guidance. If the current county tier the school is operating in does not permit an outdoor, in-person ceremony, see the **Alternatives to Commencement Ceremonies and Celebrations** section below.

### **Individual Control Measures and Screening**

Adhere to CDPH Guidance for Outdoor Seated Live Events and Performances for necessary mitigation measures to protect performers, graduates, and audience members.

- All attendees must wear masks as per CDPH Face Coverings Guidance and maintain distance of at least 6 feet from other attendees at all times, other than with household members such as when they are in their own vehicles.
  - Speakers may remove masks during their remarks as long as they are at least 6 feet away from other attendees. Speakers should keep the time for comments brief to limit the time they are unmasked.
- Attendance must be limited to school staff, graduates, household members, and family members and attendees must abide by travel limitations as indicated within the current CDPH Travel Advisory.
  - Attendees must sign up in advance of the graduation, and only those who have preregistered may attend.
  - Staff or attendants must monitor the number of attendees entering the graduation event and confirm that they had pre-registered.
- Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) should be discouraged from attending.
- Individuals who are sick or in isolation or quarantine must remain at home.

### **Screening**

- All attendees should be screened or self-screen for fever and COVID-19 symptoms before leaving home for the event.
  - Schools must communicate in writing to all graduates, their household members, school personnel, and others who may attend that if they are feeling ill, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, they should not attend the graduation event.
- Consider the timing of when ceremonies take place. Consider weather conditions, such as sun exposure, heat, and rain. Take appropriate precautions related to weather protection.

- Ensure facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.
- Set expectations, policies, and guidelines in advance, and reiterate them before the event day and at the start of the event to ensure overall health and safety.
- Consult with local public health departments, law enforcement, and legal counsel in planning any drive-in, drive-through, or recorded in-person events.

## **Entering/Exiting**

- Encourage the orderly arrival and exiting of attendees in a manner that encourages social distancing.
  - Graduates must enter and exit 6 feet apart from one another in a single line.
- Social distancing measures include:
  - Signage or pavement/ground markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting from the graduation service to ensure social distancing.
  - If a line forms outside of the graduation, staff should direct those waiting to maintain social distancing.
  - Tape, chalk, or other markings should be laid on the ground outside of the venue in order to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
  - Staff should direct people to help maintain social distancing.
  - Staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting.

## **Before, During, and After the Event**

- Staff should enforce face covering compliance throughout the event.
- The venue must be cleaned and disinfected prior to and after the event, particularly high touch surfaces (e.g., bathrooms). Consider cleaning high-touch surfaces (e.g., podium) between each speaker. Clean and disinfect shared equipment (e.g., microphones) between different users; consult equipment manufacturers regarding the appropriate method.
- Receptions before or after the graduation must comply with the restrictions within the CDPH Guidance for Gatherings appropriate to the county Blueprint tier in effect at the time.
- Food or drink concessions are only allowed per the tier limits outlined in the CDPH Outdoor Live Events and Performances Guidance. Students and families should be advised in advance regarding the availability of refreshments.
- There must be permanent or added barriers to create at least 12' between space occupied by event attendees and the focal point (e.g., stage/podium). All attendees, including graduates, school administrators, guests or family members, must remain at least 6 feet apart at all times.
  - Attendees who are not part of the same household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.
  - If there is permanent seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.

- Graduates must be seated 6 feet apart.
- Mark 6-foot sections to help attendees understand what 6 feet looks like. This can be done with small flags, tape, balloons, etc. Indicate that people should stand on or by the markers and remain 6 feet from each other.
- To comply with the 6-foot spacing, handshaking and hugs should not occur.
- Consider limiting the sharing or exchanging of materials (such as throwing graduation caps, "sign-in" practices, programs, gifts, flowers).
- Districts and schools should, if possible, send students diplomas and caps and gowns in advance through the mail or delivery so they can arrive dressed and with their diplomas in hand.
- Graduates may be invited to walk across the stage individually and turn their tassel in lieu of receiving the diploma. Alternatively, diplomas and awards could be distributed if bestowing the awards and diplomas is done in a manner that reduces contact (e.g., placing each diploma and award on a table as the graduate walks by to retrieve it). Or, hand hygiene should be performed before and after touching objects and should be available in the appropriate locations.

### **Alternatives to Commencement Ceremonies and Celebrations that Exceed Criteria Above**

The recommendations below are alternative options for commencement ceremonies and celebrations that involve more people than are permitted by the mandatory capacity caps. All commencement events must comply with state and local public health orders.

- **Virtual, recorded or live-streamed graduation ceremonies**, in which speeches, dedications, student submissions, and other festivities are live streamed to families/friends in their homes.
- **Sharing videos** of graduates' pictures, speeches, graduates' short messages to their classmates, or videos that highlight the graduates' school experiences.
- **Car parades** that are scheduled and planned in accordance with local health department requirements.
- **Drive-in, outdoor ceremonies** with graduates marching but families watching in their cars and listening to the event via local radio.
  - Only students and their household members who are not sick or in isolation or quarantine may arrive in the same vehicle.
    - All audience members must remain in their vehicle during the entire ceremony and refrain from getting out of their vehicle during the ceremony for any reason.
    - These ceremonies can be done at drive-in movie theaters, school parking lots, stadium parking lots, or other large parking lot venues that could be exclusively used for the graduation event. Multiple ceremonies or locations may be needed depending on the class size. Large projected screens and sound equipment may be required.
    - Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.
- **Use social or local media** to highlight graduates (e.g., newspapers, websites, etc.).

- **Postponement:** This could be challenging because of the evolving nature of COVID-19 and carries the risk that circumstances may be no different later than at the planned time. Postponement would lead to additional disappointment if it occurs more than once. Postponing also increases the chance of conflicting with post-graduation plans.

California Department of Public Health  
PO Box, 997377, MS 0500, Sacramento, CA 95899-7377  
Department Website (cdph.ca.gov)

