

The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide



Six Month Update

What We Have Learned about COVID-19 Since May 11, 2020



Edited by Steven A. Adelman

Back on May 11, 2020, about two months into the COVID-19 pandemic that closed most live event spaces around the world, we released the [Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide](#). With contributions from more than 300 smart friends from every aspect of entertainment and sports production, ESA created detailed guidance regarding the health and safety issues likely to arise as event professionals contemplate reopening. We are gratified to report that the *Reopening Guide* has been widely translated and cited by industry professionals everywhere.

ESA was one of the first, but we were hardly the last. Since May, many other [associations](#), [unions](#), and [industry groups](#) have written their own guidance. Knowing what to do is now less of an issue than figuring out how to enforce the basic health and safety rules – physical distancing, face covering, and hand washing – without going broke.

Now that six months of this interminable year have passed, we thought it would be useful to highlight what we have learned about how event professionals might safely get through this pandemic, provide links to useful materials, and update our recommendations.

We eagerly look forward to returning to work and welcoming patrons back to the music, sports, art, and culture that we all love.

Steven A. Adelman
Vice President, Event Safety Alliance
November 11, 2020



1. STATUS OF THE PANDEMIC

This is the part of the story we all know best, and it is not good. As of early November 2020, the western world is descending into a third wave of COVID-19 infections, even as much of Asia and New Zealand have already reopened.

In the [United States](#) alone, more than 230,000 people have died from COVID-19, and more than eight million Americans have been infected. [Globally](#), 1.1 million people have died from the pandemic, and 41 million people have been infected. These are sobering figures.

There have been some bright spots, such as [healthy drive-in events](#), [circles drawn on lawns to mark physical distancing](#), [raised concert platforms in England](#), and even a few [reopened brick and mortar theaters in the U.S.](#) But the headlines are still dominated by foreseeable super spreader events.

Much work remains to be done. That's what the rest of this Six Month Update is about.



2. CURRENT PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE

Economist John Maynard Keynes once quipped, “When my information changes, I change my mind – what do you do?” Since May, scientific knowledge about COVID-19 has advanced considerably. Most of what we understood when we wrote the *Reopening Guide* remains true and accurate, but there are some notable changes.

Most significantly, it is now recognized that [coronavirus is primarily transmitted by aerosolized droplets](#), the germs we exhale as we breathe, speak, sing, cough, or sneeze. Just like all germs, SARS-CoV-2 droplets generally travel about six feet or two meters. What has changed is that the subject of Section 4 of the *Reopening Guide*, Sanitizing the Venue, is now understood to be considerably less relevant to stopping virus transmission than good air circulation, physical distancing, and enforcing everyone wearing face coverings.

Understand that risk is a continuum, not a bright line. For example, see this chart from the [British Medical Journal](#) regarding the interrelationship between infection risk factors.

Type and level of group activity	Low occupancy			High occupancy		
	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated
Wearing face coverings, contact for short time						
Silent	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Speaking	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Shouting, singing	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Wearing face coverings, contact for prolonged time						
Silent	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	High
Speaking	Low	*	Medium	*	Medium	High
Shouting, singing	Low	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
No face coverings, contact for short time						
Silent	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Speaking	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
Shouting, singing	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High
No face coverings, contact for prolonged time						
Silent	Low	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
Speaking	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High
Shouting, singing	Medium	High	High	High	High	High

Risk of transmission
 Low ■ Medium ■ High ■

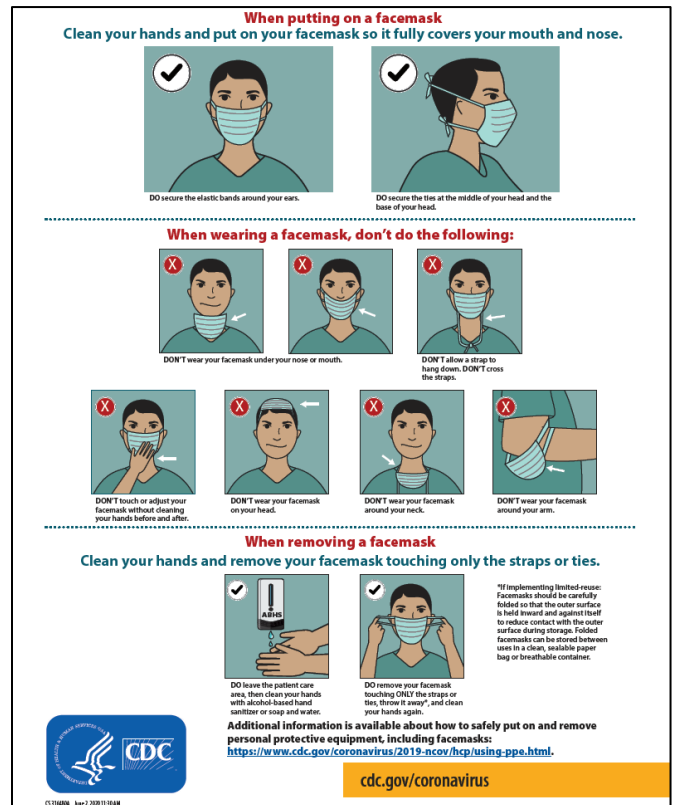
* Borderline case that is highly dependent on quantitative definitions of distancing, number of individuals, and time of exposure

To be clear, good hygiene still matters, and we anticipate that improved sanitary conditions will be a lasting positive legacy of these dark times. But current science now emphasizes that the key to staying healthy is to reduce the likelihood of breathing in someone else's infected germs. With this in mind, here are a few ways to improve your risk mitigation.

a) **Moving Air.** The most direct way to avoid breathing in someone else's droplets is to circulate them away from people or disperse them into harmlessly small quantities. For events, this is best accomplished by performing outdoors, admittedly a challenge in Winter, but one which allows you to begin planning now for a Spring reopening. Along the same lines, workers who must fly to a site are relatively safe due to [aircraft cabin air being changed 20 to 30 times per hour](#). Safety in shared vehicles to a work site can be improved by opening the windows to improve air circulation.

b) **Face Coverings.** Despite uneven local rules and enforcement, [public health guidance in the United States has unequivocally favored face coverings since early Summer](#). Because face coverings must be clean and dry to reduce the risk of transmission, workers on a job site should wear a new disposable face covering each day, ideally provided by their employer or whoever is running the site, to maximize the likelihood of full compliance.

c) **Physical Barriers for Artists.** As discussed in the British Medical Journal article linked above, any activity involving deep breathing and forceful exhalation tends to release respiratory droplets farther than usual, which suggests that six feet/two meters of physical distance may be fine in some circumstances, less helpful in others. Singers and wind and brass players may need greater distances between each other and between themselves and their audience, both during rehearsal and in performance. Environmental factors such as outdoor air currents and indoor ventilation may affect dispersion of droplets. While there is currently no definitive data establishing a "safe" distance between performers, physical barriers such as [plexiglass partitions](#), the "[Singer's Mask](#)," and [instrumentalist's masks](#) can reduce the risk of infection.



3. OPERATIONAL LESSONS FROM THE PAST SIX MONTHS

Because live event spaces were the first to close and will be the last to reopen, there have been relatively few in-person events from which to learn since the beginning of the pandemic. Advances in scientific understanding of COVID-19, however, have yielded significant lessons for event professionals looking for ways to reopen safely.

- a) **Outdoors Versus Indoors.** Because transmission most readily occurs through aerosolized droplets, outdoor events will generally pose a lower risk than indoor events. The key health issue is to avoid “close contact” with someone infected with COVID-19. In this context, [CDC defines close contact as:](#)

Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period* starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

The significance of this definition is that there is no rule that precludes all social contact closer than six feet/two meters. Rather, the risk of infection can be managed by avoiding **proximity** to a sick person for an **extended period of time**. This opens many possibilities for professionals who are both courageous and careful.

- Small brick and mortar venues will remain problematic until there is wide distribution of a vaccine. There simply is not enough physical space or air circulation to mitigate the risk of airborne transmission of the virus.
- Larger indoor venues such as museums and auto shows, where there is low occupant density, frequent crowd movement, and modern and well-maintained HVAC, pose relatively few environmental hazards. We are pleased to see some [museums reopening](#), and we look forward to events in other large open indoor spaces doing the same.
- Of course, outdoor events offer the most space and best air movement. However, we note here, as we did in May, that outdoor events raise the same severe weather and crowd management risks as always, so organizers are urged to use accurate and timely weather monitoring and apply it to a severe weather action plan that sets objective criteria to evacuate people and protect vulnerable equipment. There is a new authoritative [Crowd Management standard, ANSI ES1.9-2020](#), to help you manage people safely.



b) Testing Options. There are [two types of diagnostic tests that can detect an active coronavirus infection](#). A PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test can detect the virus's genetic material, while an antigen test (often called a "rapid test") can detect specific proteins on the surface of the virus. For event purposes, the key differences are time and accuracy.

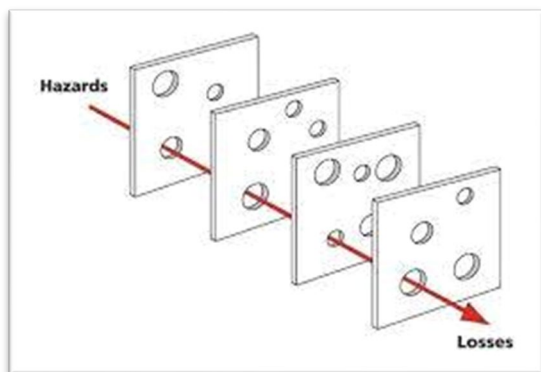
(i) PCR Test. A PCR test is most accurate, but takes longer to receive results, usually 24-72 hours depending on the lab to which the material is sent. These characteristics make PCR testing ideal for the week before a worker, event attendee, or performer plans to arrive on site, so they can have a very recent, highly accurate Negative PCR result by the time they leave for the event.

(ii) Antigen "Rapid" Test. A rapid test offers results in less than one hour, and it is reliable for Positive results, but Negative results have a lower validity rate. Rapid tests are perhaps most useful to distinguish a symptomatic person suffering from ordinary flu from someone whose symptoms are caused by coronavirus. For this reason, rapid tests performed on-site may best serve as an additional layer of risk earlier. As super spreader events at the White House have shown, rapid tests alone – without PCR testing, social distancing, or face coverings – are insufficient to prevent infection even among people who have every health and safety measure at their disposal.

c) Temperature Checks and Questionnaires at Ingress. Of the people infected with coronavirus, [as many as 40% will be asymptomatic](#) or [pre-symptomatic](#) when they seek to attend an event. This has significant implications for the health and safety checks one can do at an event's point of ingress.

One measure that has become widely adopted since March has been contactless temperature scanning. The idea is that if a person's temperature is 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, they should be denied entry and instructed to seek medical attention. But with such large numbers of infected people showing no symptoms when they are contagious, [temperature checking appears to be an ineffective means of identifying people who should be denied entry](#). The same goes for health declarations, which also rely on a person knowing they are sick. In many respects, these measures are "[health theater](#)," the veneer of a risk mitigation measure with relatively little substance behind it.

There may, however, be a different value to temperature scanning and questionnaires. They are useful to show – from the guest's first contact with the venue – that the event organizer is actively working to mitigate the health risks



associated with public activity during the pandemic. Even modestly effective screening measures can help establish a culture in that event space in which people take health and safety seriously. Particularly where physical distancing and face covering compliance is a challenge, inexpensive measures that encourage responsible behavior are a good thing. Any redundant risk mitigation system is consistent with the “[Swiss Cheese Model](#),” in

which a reasonable response to the foreseeability of routine human errors is to create layers of defenses. Back when people wore pants instead of sweats, this was referred to as a “belt and suspenders” approach to risk.



4. CHALLENGES DURING THE CURRENT ABNORMAL

While we await relief in the form of a vaccine, herd immunity, government financial relief, or divine intervention, it is worth noting the current challenges for which event professionals have few solutions of our own.

- a) **Enforcement of Health and Safety Rules.** “Health theater” is important precisely because it can still be difficult to enforce the simple rules we have known for months. As people become fatigued and just want to do what they used to do, face coverings slip off their noses and below their chins. As they drink, they become more social and less mindful of the risk of infection to themselves and the people around them. Pushback on distancing and face covering has gotten so common that CDC has published [guidance to address workplace violence associated with enforcing COVID-19 policies](#).
- b) **Uncertainty About Government Regulations.** It is hard to blame government officials for allowing more spaces to reopen, then tightening restrictions again when infection rates rise. That is what a reasonable person should do. But changing public health regulations undeniably make event planning more difficult. At the beginning of the pandemic, it became apparent that many contracts’ *force majeure* language did not address this new peril, and insurance did not cover closures due to COVID-19, leaving businesses to resolve their own disputes where there was too little money to satisfy anyone. Another consequence of the pandemic that we expect will survive is a greater focus on writing clear, objective cancellation provisions into event contracts, rather than relying on language so subjective that it resolves nothing.

c) **The Economics of Full Overhead with Reduced Capacity.** It should go without saying that paying full overhead costs with a fraction of audience revenue generally does not work. Alas, this message seems lost on too many elected officials in the United States, who have allowed economic relief bills to languish while [event spaces close their doors](#). We support efforts like the National Independent Venue Association’s [#SaveOurStages](#) program, which generates awareness and emergency relief funds. If you have work, look out for your friends who are suffering. We began page 3 of the *Reopening Guide*, “We’re all in this together.” That applies at least as much today as it did six months ago.

5. CALL TO ACTION

Event professionals are problem-solvers. We make the impossible look easy, and we do it under circumstances that would most people slink away to weep in a dark corner. But none of us can dig out of this hole alone. Let’s help each other.

We think our industry is better than the performers who have elevated a moment of fun over health and safety. Those headlines misrepresent the smart, socially conscious people we know, but the only way to prove that is to use all our channels of communication to articulate that shows simply cannot go on until there is widespread compliance.

We call on influencers to promote good behavior. Particularly given the misinformation from some “leaders,” it would be great for artists and other people with influence to get involved on the side of health and safety. Likewise, event and sports promoters and their corporate partners can use their marketing muscle to urge entertainment-hungry patrons to follow the science regarding physical distancing, face covering, and hand washing, and to explain how these measures are essential to getting fans back into seats.

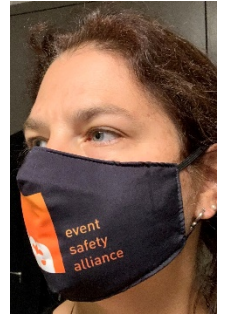
6. HEALTH AND SAFETY RESOURCES

In addition to the links embedded above, the Event Safety Alliance has collected a trove of health and safety guidance from other organizations, companies, and countries over the last six months. Rather than try to choose our favorites, we emphasize the value of the authoritative health and safety guidance from public health agencies such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) in the United States and the [World Health Organization](#).

If you have a question regarding a particular type of guidance, please email us at info@eventsafetyalliance.org. We will be glad to help.



The mission of the Event Safety Alliance is to create a culture of safety in all event productions that puts life safety first. To join us, click our [Membership](#) link. Click [here](#) to purchase a stylish and healthy ESA face covering. For more information about who we are and what we do, email us at info@eventsafetyalliance.org.



Here are ESA's virtual training and education programs during the pandemic:

- [The Event Safety Summit](#), "The New Abnormal," December 7 – 11, 2020
- [OSHA 10](#) and [OSHA 30](#) Training
- [The Event Safety Podcast](#)
- [Event Safety Access Training](#)



Thanks to our many smart and energetic members, ESA has created much of the leading safety guidance for professionals working in the live event industry. All of it is available as a free download.

- [ANSI ES1.9-2020 Crowd Management](#)
- [The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide](#)
- [The Event Safety Guide](#)

We look forward to returning to work, safely.

