

Decision Paper: COVID-19

Mass Gatherings

To:	Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response		
From:	Hon Dr David Clark, Minister of Health		
Date:	18 March 2020		
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20200484

Purpose

1. This paper seeks approval of updated advice for the public regarding mass gatherings.
2. This paper includes:
 - a. draft "mass gatherings guidelines" to be published on the Ministry of Health website once finalised [Appendix 1];
 - b. a flowchart to enable event organisers to determine which events should be cancelled given the evolving COVID-19 situation [Appendix 2]; and
 - c. draft talking points for Ministers [Appendix 3].

Comment

3. Mass gatherings can pose a risk for the community transmission of COVID-19. There is need for clarification around recommendations on mass gatherings to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19.
4. Cancelling mass gatherings can help slow the spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand, reduce the number of people infected, and protect those who are more vulnerable to severe illness.
5. When we talk about mass gatherings, we consider that families or household groups should be considered as a unit. However, to help avoid community transmission, these guidelines have been drafted on the basis that the unit should try to maintain social distancing from those that they wouldn't normally be in close contact with. On 16 March 2020, Cabinet:
 - a. **noted** that the global situation regarding COVID-19 is developing rapidly
 - b. **noted** that there are a number of mass gatherings scheduled for March 2020
 - c. **noted** that cancelling mass gatherings can help slow the spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand, reduce the number of people infected, and protect those who are more vulnerable to severe illness;
 - d. **agreed** that gatherings of 500 or more people, held outdoors or indoors, should be cancelled;

- e. **agreed** that the above decision applies to events including festivals, fairs, business events, sporting, religious and cultural events;
 - f. **directed** officials to submit further advice to the Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response as soon as possible on guidance around events of different sizes, including statutory powers.
6. Based on Cabinet's decision, officials have developed "mass gathering guidelines", including a flowchart, to empower event organisers to understand the circumstances under which they should cancel events, and to educate the public to enable them to decide if they wish to attend smaller events.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the CVD committee:

1. **Agree** to release the "mass gatherings guidelines" and flowchart on the Ministry of Health website once finalised.
2. **Note** the draft talking points about the "mass gatherings guidelines".

ENDS

Appendix 1: Mass Gatherings Guidelines

The Ministry of Health has provided the following guidelines on mass gatherings. It has asked that organisers follow the advice to help support our public services in responding to COVID-19.

A flowchart is created to help event organisers to decide whether or not to proceed with events. This flowchart can be found in Appendix 2.

In these guidelines, groups that are consistently in close proximity are considered as a unit.

Our guidelines are intended for individuals or units to maintain social distance from those outside of the unit.

If a person were to come into contact with anyone suspected of being infected with COVID-19, it is expected to follow our guidelines on self-isolation. However, for those individuals or units that are still able to participate in the community, and to help avoid community transmission, the unit or the individual should try to maintain a distance from those that they wouldn't normally be in contact with.

Mass gathering definition

A mass gathering is an event where a large number of people will congregate in a single space or area for 15 minutes or more for a specific purpose. This may include, but is not limited to, sporting, business, arts and music, religious and non-denominational celebrations (graduations, weddings, funerals and tangi) and recreational events.

Mass gatherings include public and private events.

Officials recommend that any mass gathering of 500 or more attendees is cancelled. We also recommend the cancellation of events where the event meets any one (or more) of the criteria below.

- The gathering does not have tickets or an attendance list (i.e. you would be unable to track who actually attended the event if a community transmission resulted)
- The gathering may include attendees that are from communities where COVID-19 has recently been, or is currently circulating (excluding small household clusters)
- The gathering will predominantly include attendees from demographic groups who are at greater risk of severe disease, such as those who are immunocompromised, have comorbidities such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or cancer, or are over 70 years old.
- The gathering may impact on the workforce responding to COVID-19 (i.e if healthcare workers be required at the gathering, or there a risk that healthcare workers could be exposed en masse if a transmission occurred)
- The gathering will include activities that may promote transmission such as singing, cheering or close physical contact (for example, sharing food or beverages or dancing)

If an event does not meet any of the above criteria, we recommend that you consider whether the event can *proceed with caution* using with the following mitigations:

- Social distancing can be put in place (keeping the recommended distance apart as defined in the COVID-19 case definition on the Ministry of Health website)
- Appropriate hygiene measures can be put in place (this will be dependent on the gathering type, but could include supplying a sufficient number of hand hygiene stations and other protective measures as needed)
- The type and size of venue is considered for an indoor venue. For example, a large indoor venue with strong ventilation and the ability to support social distancing will be more appropriate than a small, enclosed space.

For example:

- An outdoor event of 200 proposed attendees that is not ticketed should be cancelled.
- An indoor wedding of 100 people (no reception) in a well-ventilated space that can demonstrate social distancing could continue with caution.

Considerations for group gatherings

Good hygiene practice is key to helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This means we all need to:

- cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or coughing/sneezing into your elbow
- dispose of used tissues appropriately in a bin
- wash our hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and dry them thoroughly, or use hand sanitiser:
 - before eating or handling food
 - after using the toilet
 - after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or wiping children's noses
 - after touching public surfaces
- keeping the recommended distance apart as defined in the COVID-19 case definition on the Ministry of Health website

The measures above are especially important for people who have existing health conditions, such as those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, renal failure, chronic lung disease or compromised immune systems.

Why is the Ministry of Health recommending that mass gatherings be cancelled?

The cancellation of mass gatherings and events is an important aspect of reducing physical contact, and delaying the onset of community transmission of COVID-19. Physical contact is a way that COVID-19 can spread from person to person.

What is an essential mass gathering?

Mass gatherings that we currently consider to be essential, and outside of the remit of these guidelines, are Parliamentary activity, workplace activity, childcare facility activity, use of public transport, and teaching and learning activity at schools and universities.

All other gatherings are considered non-essential.

What does social distancing mean?

Social distancing means keeping the recommended distance apart as defined in the COVID-19 case definition on the Ministry of Health website. You can find the most up to date case definition [here](#).

Tikanga Māori

In order to reduce physical contact and delay the onset of community transmission community, we now have a strong need to vary our Māori tikanga and kawa.

We want to acknowledge there are some marae and iwi (such as Te Atiawa and Ngāti Kahungunu) who have adjusted their usual tikanga and kawa practices in response to COVID-19.

We know our people will do the right thing to protect our iwi, hapū and whānau.

Do these guidelines apply to educational providers?

These guidelines do not apply to the delivery of teaching and learning at schools and educational providers (including childcare centres). Separate guidelines are being provided to educational providers on these activities.

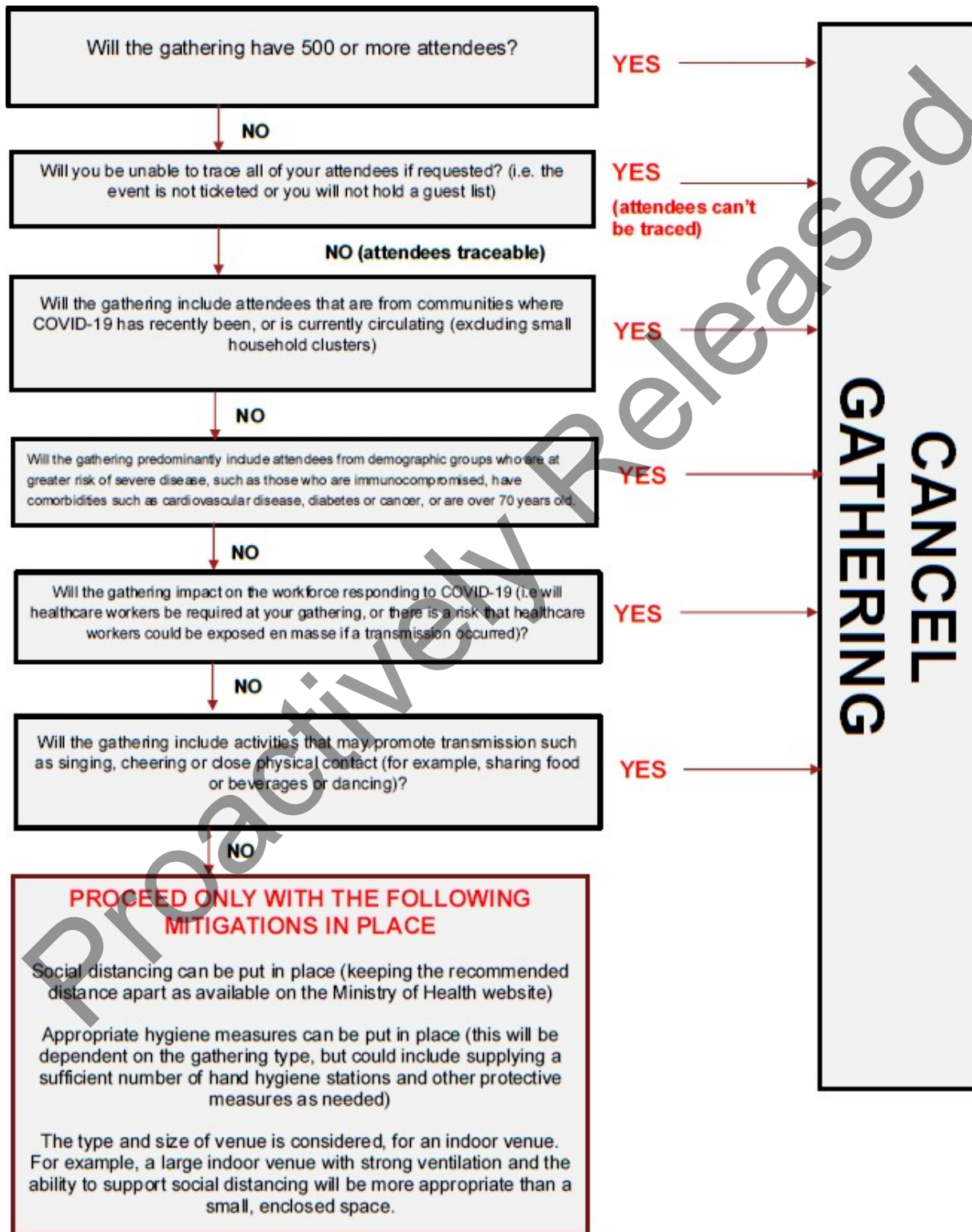
However, we expect that educational providers will consider gatherings that fall under the definition of mass gatherings (such as all of school assemblies or theatre productions) using these guidelines.

Does this apply to public transport or workplaces?

This advice is for mass gatherings only and does not apply to public transport, swimming pools, public libraries, supermarkets and workplaces.

Separate advice is being provided to workplaces and to the public regarding the use of public transport.

Appendix 2: Mass Gatherings – flow chart



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