

Austin Public Health Recommendations for K-12 Graduation Ceremonies May 5, 2021



Purpose

These are Austin Public Health COVID-19 Safety Recommendations for K-12 graduation ceremonies. These safety standards are minimum recommendations only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The organizer and venue operator for each graduation ceremony is responsible for adhering to [local Health Authority Rules and control orders](#) on COVID-19, as well as any state and federal requirements. The public health data for disease prevention that inform these guidelines can and does change frequently.

Public Messaging

- Set expectations, policies, and guidelines in advance of the ceremony and ensure all students and families are aware of established policies, to ensure overall health and safety.
- Leading up to and during the ceremony, and through multiple modes of communication, let students and families know their full cooperation with and adherence to the range of COVID-19 prevention measures and requirements for the event is absolutely necessary.
- Strongly discourage students and families from attending or organizing celebrations or parties apart from the official graduation ceremony that bring together people from multiple households. Disseminate this message leading up to, during, and after the ceremony, and through multiple modes of communication. Communicate the risks these gatherings could pose to families, friends, and the broader community.
- Provide signage and a full range of communication modes to continuously remind attendees, volunteers and staff to adhere to the COVID-19 mitigation measures and requirements.

Venue

- Ceremonies should be held in a space that can accommodate recommended physical distancing (see details in next section) and has good ventilation.
- It is recommended graduation events be held outdoors in open-air venues such as football stadiums.
- If tents are used, it is recommended that at least 50% of the perimeter be open.
- Consider dividing graduating classes into multiple ceremonies to keep ceremonies as small as possible. Event organizers should determine the number of graduation events needed based upon class size and available space to maintain physical distancing protocol.

Physical Distancing and Capacity Limits

- When planning graduation ceremonies, follow the table below to determine the recommended capacity limits and feet of physical distancing between individuals or households based on the Stages of Risk and whether the ceremony will be held indoors or outdoors.

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Recommendations on Capacity Limits and Physical Distancing* for Graduation Ceremonies		
<i>* In this table, physical distancing refers to the distance between individuals and groups from different households.</i>		
Stage of Risk	Indoor Ceremonies	Outdoor Ceremonies
Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 75% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 6 feet of physical distancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No capacity limit Strict implementation of 3 feet of physical distancing
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 50% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 6 feet of physical distancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 75% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 3 feet of physical distancing
Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 25% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 6 feet of physical distancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 50% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 6 feet of physical distancing
Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 25% capacity, with masking Strict implementation of 6 feet of physical distancing
Stage 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual graduation

- Ensure the number of people in attendance will not exceed any capacity limits for the venue at which the ceremony will be held.
- Per the above table, ensure the recommended amount of physical distance between:
 - Graduates
 - Guests who are not part of the same household (Guests who are members of the same household may sit together without physical distancing.)
 - Between teachers, staff, and guests on the stage, dais, or platform
- Throughout the event, discourage attendees from gathering together in groups with others from different households. Remind attendees that in no instance should they stand together to socialize in a group of more than 10 people who are from different households.
- Consider blocking every other row of seats and staggering seating within rows.
- It is recommended schools keep a record of graduate seating assignments for use in identifying close contacts later if needed.
- Post clearly visible signage regarding the need to maintain recommended amount of physical distancing.
- Put markers outside to maintain the recommended amount of physical distance between people as they are waiting to enter.
- Establish directional pathways to manage foot traffic flow and minimize contact (e.g., one-way entrance and exit, one-way pathways). One-way aisles should be at least ten feet wide; two-way

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aisles should be at least twenty feet wide.

- Install physical barriers for check-in stations where possible. Where not possible, ensure the recommended amount of physical distance is maintained.

Attendance

- Everyone (e.g., student, family, faculty, staff) **must** wear a face covering while in attendance. Refer to [Health Authority Rules](#) Section 2.1.2 on exceptions to wearing face coverings.
- Guests should be encouraged to obtain COVID-19 vaccine at least 2 weeks prior to the ceremony, or if not vaccinated, to receive a negative COVID-19 test result within 3 days of the event.
- Attendance should be limited to teachers, staff, administrators, speakers, graduates, and their guests only.
- Number of guests per graduate should be determined based on consideration of all the following factors:
 - Venue capacity
 - Number of graduates
 - Physical distancing and capacity recommendations in table on page 1 of this document
 - Number of total attendees organizers can safely monitor to ensure COVID-19 mitigation measures are adhered to throughout the event
- It is strongly recommended that graduates be limited to no more than 4 guests at a maximum to keep ceremonies as small as possible.
- Consider having guests register in advance and allowing only those who have registered to attend. Contactless registration is encouraged.

Program

- Strongly encourage limiting the length of ceremonies to shorten the time the individuals are exposed to each other.
- Limit speakers and ensure that individuals do not share microphones or other equipment unless it is appropriately cleaned and disinfected between use.
- Limit or avoid singing and the playing of brass and wind instruments. Avoid singing indoors. For graduations involving outdoor singing or the indoor or outdoor playing of brass or wind instruments, consider the following special distancing recommendations:
 - At least 10 feet between performers
 - At least 25 feet between performers and first row of the audience
- Assign staff to track total attendance to ensure maximum occupancy limits are not exceeded.
- Assign staff to monitor entrances and exits and restrooms to prevent congregation.
- If multiple ceremonies are occurring in the same location, stagger event times to avoid congregation of guests in different groups and to allow for thorough cleaning of the space between events, including seating areas.
- Avoid social congregation before, during, and after the event. Do not include side events (games/selfie areas, tailgating, and food cart/truck areas) to reduce the areas in which groups will gather, whether formally or informally.
- Use electronic ceremony programs where possible.

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Logistics

- To the extent possible, ensure students receive diplomas and caps and gowns in advance, so they can arrive dressed and with their diplomas in hand to avoid exchanging of items in-person.
- To the extent possible, reduce restroom occupancy.
- Do not have any refreshments or food to prevent the need for people to remove masks and to reduce areas of congregation and additional areas to monitor.
- Clearly communicate expectations and procedures related to photography, and ensure all students and families are aware of and adhere to photography policies. Consider having a photographer take pictures of all individual graduates and provide the photos to families to reduce concern of missing these important moments.
- Do not shake hands with each graduate or student.
- Maintain a supply of face masks to provide to those guests who arrive without a mask.

Screening

- Attendees should be screened before attending the ceremony. This could be through the registration process, through an app or onsite. Attendees should not attend if they:
 - Have a fever (100.0° and above) or other COVID-19 symptoms
 - Have had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 and have not completed the required quarantine period
 - Are currently required to self-isolate or quarantine

Hygiene, Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water, wherever possible and encourage frequent handwashing; alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol may be used as an alternative and shall be made available at entrances, exits and throughout the venue.
- Post visible signage throughout the venue to remind workers, guests, and graduates of hygiene and safety protocols.
- Conduct frequent disinfecting of heavy transit areas, high-touch surfaces and shared equipment (e.g., microphones, podiums, doorknobs, bathrooms, seats, ticket counters).

Reporting

- Attendees should immediately notify the school if they test positive for COVID-19 after the ceremony.
- Schools should immediately report any cases to APH and advise likely close contacts to self-quarantine. Testing should be recommended for anyone identified as close contact or who became sick after the ceremony.