

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), Bureau for Public Health (BPH) continues to respond to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in West Virginia. BPH is working closely with communities, state agencies, local and federal partners to monitor the ongoing risk of COVID-19 and ensure the health and protection of all individuals in West Virginia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created questions related to traditional proms. DHHR understands the milestone that high school graduation represents in students' lives and as the end of the 2020-2021 school year approaches, the Department has investigated potential solutions for local consideration regarding proms. The decision to hold proms for individual schools should be a decision of the local board of education in consultation with the local health department. It is important for the event organizers to consider how an in-person prom may be held while observing state and local guidelines. BPH offers the following best practices to help protect individuals, their families, and communities from COVID-19 during prom celebrations.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- Recent loss of taste or smell

### PERSON-TO-PERSON TRANSMISSION

- Occurs via small droplets from the nose or mouth of the infected person when they cough, sneeze, or exhale.
- Virus can remain on surfaces for a limited time period. Although less common, transmission may occur from touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

### GENERAL PREVENTION

- Learn about COVID-19 from reputable sources
- Maintain physical distance of at least 6 feet between yourself and others
- Encourage proper handwashing
- Clean and sanitize surfaces often
- Do not share food, drinks, etc.
- Wear cloth face coverings
- Stay home if you feel sick
- Isolate sick individuals
- Get vaccinated when you are eligible to get a vaccine

### WHO SHOULD NOT ATTEND IN-PERSON PROM

- Individuals at [high risk](#) for severe illness from COVID-19 should stay home. Consider recording or livestreaming the event.
- Those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 should stay home for 10 days from symptom onset date or test date if asymptomatic.
- Those who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days from their last exposure to a confirmed case.
- Individuals experiencing or those who have someone in their household experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

### THE RISK OF COVID-19 SPREADING

Schools are encouraged to consult the local health departments of their respective county with questions related to health and safety in hosting a prom. In general, the risk of COVID-19 spreading at any event or gathering, including proms, increases as follows:

- **Lowest risk:** Virtual-only activities.
- **Moderate risk:** Smaller outdoor and in-person gathering in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear masks, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).
- **Higher risk:** Medium-sized in-person gathering that is adapted to allow individuals to remain

spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.

- **Highest risk:** Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

**Additionally, the following factors contribute to the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 and should be considered individually and together to determine the risk of infection at a prom:**

- **Virtual vs. in-person proms** – Virtual events or those with the minimum number of attendees pose lower risk for the spread of COVID-19.
- **Community levels of COVID-19** – Higher levels of COVID-19 in the community increase the risk of spread at any event. When considering whether to attend or host a prom or a related event, schools and families should check the [levels of COVID-19](#) in their community.
- **The location of the event** – Activities in poorly ventilated indoor locations increase the risk of spread of COVID-19. Outdoor locations or those with open windows and doors are better alternatives.
- **The duration of the event** – Events that last longer periods of time pose a greater risk than shorter ones.
- **The number of people at the event** – Events with more people pose greater risk than those with fewer people. Limiting the number of attendees helps avoid higher risk of spread.

#### GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR PROMS

Due to the COVID-19 case numbers remaining high, DHHR recommends avoiding large events. Attending large events increases risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. Virtual proms may be the best alternative to celebrate and acknowledge this important milestone in students' lives.

#### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR IN-PERSON PROMS WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING

While virtual celebration is the best alternative, individual schools and local boards of education may choose to allow in-person proms in consultation with their local health departments. In making this decision, community transmission levels should be accounted for and careful planning should take place

in order to comply with the [Governor's Executive Orders](#). Planned proms for grades 9-12 will need to be postponed if the county is red on the DHHR County Alert System Map or by order of the Governor.

**There are a number of solutions that can be utilized to host proms using social distancing:**

- **Event halls/venues:** Any indoor venue chosen for prom should have adequate ventilation and maximum occupancy limits. Planning committees should choose a venue that will accommodate physical distancing measures.
- **Increase the number and decrease the size:** Instead of hosting one prom, a series of smaller events may be hosted in the same venue to comply with the maximum occupancy limits set forth by the state and to accommodate larger groups of students. For example, a high school could host a prom in a multipurpose room or gym that may allow for groups of 50-75 students at a time. That event would be repeated to accommodate all participating students.

#### SCREENING FOR COVID-19

- Individuals who feel ill, have symptoms, a positive test, or were exposed in the past 14 days to COVID-19 should not be allowed to attend prom and should be instructed to return home and isolate.
- All attendees are recommended to be screened for COVID-19 symptoms upon arrival.
- Consider screening all attendees by testing students 24-48 hours prior to the event to identify cases and prevent transmission.

#### VENUES

- Designate staff or volunteers to stand at the entrance and strictly control admission.
- Place COVID-19 signage around all entries and throughout the venue outlining social distancing standards.
- Provide hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content at entrances, exits, and near high touch surfaces such as door handles.
- Consider directing traffic flow within the venue. This can be accomplished with signs, ropes, floor decals, etc.



## FACE COVERINGS/MASKS

- All individuals should wear a face covering to comply with the [Governor's Executive Order](#).
- Institute a face mask monitor to ensure compliance.
- Face coverings should completely cover the nose and mouth, fit snugly against the sides of the face, and not have any gaps.

## TRANSPORTATION

- Stagger student arrival and pick up times by small groups.
- The use of carpooling, limousines, and buses should be discouraged due to potential exposures by having close contact with passengers.

## PICTURES

- Encourage photos to be taken as individuals or in pairs.
- Use an open-air photo booth/stand with an attendant/photographer to take photos.
- Group photos should be limited to outside only. Individuals can remove their face coverings for a brief period no longer than three minutes with an attendant/photographer to take the pictures.

## FOOD/DINING

- It is strongly recommended to only provide light refreshments as part of prom. Serving beverages with straws can minimize the need to remove an individual's face covering.
- Refreshments should be individually wrapped. If items need to be served, an attendant should be used to help serve items so that only one person is handling serving ware.
- Seating should be provided for all attendees to discourage standing and congregating. Tables should be assigned and not shared. Tables should be spaced 6 feet apart from each other with a limited number of chairs around the table.
- Masks can be removed while seated to eat.

## DANCING/ACTIVITIES

- Provide alternatives such as activities or games that can support social distancing.
- Limit the number of people on the dance floor at one time; consider dividing attendees into groups for dancing and repeat or split popular songs if necessary so everyone can enjoy the music in succession.

- Encourage social distancing through line dancing or forward-facing group dances (e.g., the Electric Slide).
- Eliminate or limit the amount of slow dancing songs to limit close physical contact.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [CDC considerations for events and gatherings](#)
- [Protect yourself and others](#)

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the 24/7, toll-free COVID-19 information hotline:

**1-800-887-4304**

