



Photo: Boston Park Plaza/Melissa Ostrow

**COVID-19**

# CLEAN + SAFE GUIDANCE

**FOR MEETINGS &  
EVENTS**

**February, 2021**





# MEETING & EVENT GUIDANCE

## Let's start off with the obvious.

Getting back to business is going to be different for everyone.

People's expectations of normal have changed and getting "back" will require planning, enhanced communications, and above all else, adaptability. Just like the myriad of options the hotel and lodging industry offers its guests, re-opening for meetings and events won't be one-size fits all.

## The Massachusetts Lodging Association is here to help.

This Clean & Safe Guide for Meetings & Events provides recommendations and suggestions to make getting back to business easier.

### PLANNING AHEAD

- ☑ Make sure your employee expectations of a clean and safe work environment are met, if not exceeded. You'll need to prepare for different scenarios for when hotels are allowed to host meetings. Similar to when hotels re-opened for individual travelers, for meetings, this might include a different set of employees who are caring for others, have children at home, and perhaps even have an apprehension to return to the workplace.
- ☑ For meeting and event attendees, this is going to be a brave new world. Expect business to start off slow and for both meeting planners as well as attendees to not exactly know what being clean and safe means to them.

### ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS

- ☑ Talk to your employees. Outline the steps you're taking to protect them. Whether your property has been closed and you'll need your employees to get back in the groove or if you've remained open with a limited team, more communication is going to be needed.
- ☑ People aren't going to travel unless they feel safe and attending meetings adds another layer of complexity. Remember that any type of gatherings have been limited, so this aspect of service is going to be new to our guests and will take time to get used to - just like the COVID-19 guidelines for everyday life we are all used to by now. We always need to make our our guests and visitors feel safe. This is step #1 as far as our guests are concerned.

### ADAPTABILITY

- ☑ Change is hard. Changing behavior is even harder. If there is one thing that is certain in these unique times, it's uncertainty. Be prepared to change and adapt. What works on the first day of re-opening meetings & events may be fine, or it may not work at all. The standards that are put in place may be too much, too little, or just right...and that may change over time as well.

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for the latest information.



This guide will provide some ideas and concepts for meeting planning and arrival considerations, cleaning protocols, meeting protocols, food service considerations and vendor/contractor considerations, as well as workplace cleaning and safety suggestions, discussion of the possible guest experience, and finally, cleaning guidance.

Additional guidance relevant for hotel and lodging operations, including dine-in restaurants, bars, fitness centers, family entertainment centers, hair salons, and retail operations, is available on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts COVID-19 Website.

As everyone continues to learn more about operating a lodging facility during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, it's important to stay updated on the latest information from the Center for Disease Control, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, your own local health department, and, of course, MLA's web site at [www.masslodging.com](http://www.masslodging.com). In this ever-changing environment, it's important to remain current on the latest information.

## OVERVIEW

IN ADDITION TO GUEST ROOMS, hotel and lodging properties provide meeting rooms, event space, and food & beverage for all types of 'group' customers, such as corporations associations, religious groups, social groups, charities and others.

It's important to institute appropriate guidelines in order to re-establish meetings and events in Massachusetts lodging properties. As this segment of business requires unique cleaning & safety protocols, the Massachusetts Lodging Association is providing this meeting and event guidance for the safety of the meeting/event attendees and employees, as well as guests and others.

Please note, these guidelines are in addition to the MLA COVID-19 Clean & Safe Guidelines for individual travel and the Massachusetts Safety Standards and Checklist: Operators of Lodgings produced by the Commonwealth.

In addition to these standards, lodging properties should also consider implementing additional protocols for individual travelers and employees such as the MLA Clean & Safe Self Certification, the American Hotel & Lodging Association's Safe Stay initiative, and/or the Global BioRisk Advisory Council STAR Accreditation Program, among other programs.

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# PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

**Meeting planning will need to be an even more collaborative process with planners, clients and customers.** In the current environment, all parties must approach meetings and events in a completely new way to keep attendees safe, while providing flexibility and creativity that our customers have come to expect. No matter the size or format of the meeting or event, health and safety are the primary concerns.

Now more than ever, the decision to hold a meeting or put on an event is a major choice for customers. Once that decision has been made, the myriad of format choices including virtual, hybrid, and in-person will need to be determined to satisfy the meeting goals and find the right operational solutions for all involved. Pre-meeting planning discussions and virtual site inspections should be encouraged to kick off the planning process, evaluate formats and services, and to build the relationship with the team responsible for the success of the meeting or event.

## CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:

- ☑ Ensure planners, clients and customers are educated about federal, state and local health and safety regulations and/or guidance and any hotel rules that may also apply, in preparation for enforcement.
- ☑ Pre-event communications with attendees to inform and set expectations.
- ☑ Registration:
  - Electronic advance registration.
  - Mobile check-in, where applicable.
  - Larger area/allow more time for on-site registration.
- ☑ Moderating traffic flow by staggering start/break times.
- ☑ Longer break times:
  - For employees to refresh and clean meeting rooms between sessions.
  - Allow time for guests to go to their guest rooms for restroom breaks.
- ☑ Leverage technology for hybrid meetings.
- ☑ Utilization of multiple meeting rooms for a single meeting with technology to ensure physical distancing.
- ☑ Encourage same seating over multiple days.
- ☑ Rotate presenters/speakers to limit attendee movement.
- ☑ Non-contact, contact-light or cashless transactions.

# ARRIVAL CONSIDERATIONS



**While pre-registration is always recommended, there might also be a need for on-site registration and/or a check-in process.** Remember, registration sets the tone for the meeting and this is going to be a different experience than the guest check-in process, so registration should be viewed as another opportunity for a first impression. In the registration setting, the priority should be on social distancing and, as much as possible, a contactless experience.

## CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:

- ☑ Consider screening protocols (such as temperature and/or symptom screenings) when attendees register for the event and for each day thereafter.
- Make information materials available on COVID-19 and be ready to provide the

proper contact information (to local public health, for example) if symptoms develop or if an attendee learns of close contact, so prompt remedial actions can be taken to contain the risk.

- ☑ Face coverings are to be required of all guests, vendors, and employees throughout the registration process, as well as during the meeting/event, with limited exceptions in accordance with the Massachusetts Health Order.
- ☑ Registration desks, kiosks, or tables are to be one person per six feet.
- ☑ Consider staggered registration hours.
- ☑ Similar to the front desk:
  - Utilize transparent barriers such as plexiglass dividers.
  - Encourage electronic options when possible using personal smartphones or tablets.
  - Have stanchions where appropriate and when needed.
  - Floor signs/clings for physical distancing.
  - Over-communicate with signage.
  - Provide hand sanitizer for both employees and attendees as needed.
- ☑ Consider distributing registration materials in advance of the meeting/event.
- ☑ Encourage limited single use materials such as name tags and other registration materials where practical.
- ☑ Consider placement of meeting materials at attendees seats prior to arrival.
- ☑ Encourage a strategy in consultation with planners, clients and customers to capture attendee contact information, for potential contact tracing.



# CLEANING PROTOCOLS



**In addition to the cleaning and disinfecting protocols required by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health via Massachusetts' COVID-19 Industry guidance for hotels and lodging properties, meeting and events require specific cleaning protocols modeled after CDC and EPA guidelines.** Be sure to also review any applicable local guidelines, as well.

## CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:

- ☑ Clean & sanitize meeting room tables and chairs prior to each new set-up
- ☑ Sanitize or disinfect service equipment, frequently touched common surfaces and high-touch areas during the event and after each use.
- ☑ All food service equipment, for serving hot and cold plates, belts and hot boxes, should be washed and sanitized before and after use.
- ☑ Have hand sanitizer stations available throughout the meeting space, at meals, and if applicable, placed at entrances and exits.
- ☑ Strict adherence to wearing gloves (no bare-hand protocol) when setting up tables and preparing all attendee touch points (e.g. glassware, roll-ups, etc) and when refreshing event areas and meeting rooms.
- ☑ Increase cleaning schedules for common areas and high-contact touchpoints such as doors, escalator railings and elevators.
- ☑ Replace soiled linens after each use and clean them per CDC guidelines.
- ☑ To reduce contact, where practical, and not contrary to security and safety procedures, doors and windows will be placed open.
- ☑ For restrooms:
  - Adjust protocols for cleaning and spacing of meeting room restrooms.
  - Guide guests in adhering to physical distancing protocols for restroom capacities.
  - Increase cleaning and sanitation throughout the event and after heavy break use.



# MEETING PROTOCOLS



**For meetings and events, physical distancing is the primary focus for attendees, along with reducing contact where possible.** From registration to the meeting or event, including breaks, meals and limited capacity on elevators, physical distancing is key to successful meetings. Additionally, signage, physical barriers and managing amenities are equally important.

## CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:

- ☑ Provide directional signage to attendees, adhering to physical distancing protocols.
  - If available, where possible, take advantage of digital signage for meeting and event space.
- ☑ Utilize specific and/or branded floor signs or clings.
  - This is especially helpful for directional guidance.
  - If possible, designate entrances and exits.
- ☑ Reorganize areas to allow for social distancing, limit traffic to one-direction and establish transparent barriers where physical distancing may be challenging.
- ☑ Provide signage at elevators.
- ☑ Discontinue coat-checks and other amenities that unnecessarily increase the risk of contact.
- ☑ To the extent possible, manage attendance to meeting and event areas via technology, visible cues such as wristbands and badges, or physical controls such as secure entry and exit points.
  - For multi-day events, consider different color wrist bands, badges.
- ☑ For exhibits:
  - If necessary, limit the number of people allowed to enter exhibit areas.
  - Provide hand sanitizer in exhibit areas, including entrances and exits.
  - Utilizing floor signs or clings, designate one-way traffic flow.
  - Frequently touched surfaces are to be cleaned frequently.
  - Consider providing guidance for giveaways, so attendees respect physical distancing.
- ☑ Adjust floor plans by evaluating capacities to allow for physical distancing.
  - Capacities are to be adjusted to meet state and local guidelines, as they evolve.
  - Floor plans allow for stanchions, effective queuing and proper ingress/egress routes.
- ☑ Outdoor activities:
  - Consider outdoor meetings & events when weather permits.
  - Outdoor areas can provide additional spacing during breaks.
  - Consider meeting and event set-up or design to allow for areas that can be open to the outside.
  - Establish heat/cold illness prevention plan to protect employees.
- ☑ For speakers and presenters, make sure that stage areas are appropriately physically distanced.

- ☑ Specific floor plans, which should always take physically distancing (six feet of spacing) into consideration between attendees:

**Classroom:**

- One person per six foot table or two people, if seating is at opposite sides of the table.
- Six feet between the front and back of each chair.
- Minimum of eight feet circulation areas.
- Attendees face the same direction.

**Theater:**

- One chair per six feet of seating.
- Minimum of eight feet circulation areas.
- Attendees face the same direction.

**Rounds:**

- Six-foot rounds and four chairs per round.
- Six-foot aisles between chairs.
- Minimum of eight feet circulation areas.

- ☑ Meeting room refreshers and amenities:

- Guests are recommended to stay in the same areas during refreshes.
- Attendee seating remains constant/assigned - sitting in the same location for each session.
- For break-out sessions, consider moving speakers/presenters instead of attendees.
- Multi-use items such as notepads, pens and candies are individually wrapped and presented or discontinued.
- Consider individual meeting attendee amenity bags placed at seating.
- Conference room settings can include new or single use items.





# FOOD SERVICE CONSIDERATIONS



**Hotels can continue providing the same high-quality food and beverage selections and world-class service our customers and attendees have come to expect.** New practices and protocols will be implemented to modify and adjust our current offerings to allow for proper physical distancing and reduce overall contact where possible.

- ☑ Attendant served individual plated meals.
  - Discontinue pre-setting food, beverages or condiments.
  - Plated items remain covered until service.
  - All cutlery should be provided via flatware roll up or sealed individual plasticware. Where flatware roll-up is provided, sealed individual plasticware may be requested.
  - Communal food and beverage, including water pitchers on tables, should be prohibited. Beverages should be served tableside.
  - Side stations are for clean/fresh items only and protected between servings.
  - Food, waste and napkins will be cleared to the back of the house.
  - Plan for longer meal times and consider multiple assigned meal times.
- ☑ Consider adding floor signs/clings to promote physical distancing where a line may develop.

- ☑ Attendant served receptions and/or breaks.
  - Beverage services require an attendant.
  - Food service options include single or double-sided access (served only) with six-foot barriers in front of food displays and one way traffic flow.
- ☑ Single use, individually sealed food and beverage items served as practical.
  - Encourage pre-packaged and preset menu options.
  - Set up stanchions or other barriers to ensure physical distancing.
- ☑ Water stations in event and/or exhibit areas (with an attendant) as appropriate.
  - Single use water containers only
- ☑ Beverage stations (including bars) must have a server.
  - Six-foot barriers at beverage stations.
  - One server per six-foot area.
  - One separate table for completed beverages: Prepared beverages should be placed on a separate surface and surface to be cleaned frequently.
  - Focus on use of canned/pre-batched cocktails and bottled wines.
  - Focus on bottled juice mixers instead of sliced bar fruit/garnishes.
  - Packaged sustainable straws and stir sticks as needed.

If possible, consider offering non-cash or contactless transactions, including room charges, to reduce contact levels for any food and beverage service requiring payment.

# VENDOR/ CONTRACTOR CONSIDERATIONS



**Vendor and contractor partners are to provide a safe and healthful workplace for all employees, guests and business partners. Employees, guests and vendors will follow the below guidelines concerning general hygiene and disinfecting equipment between uses.**

## **CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:**

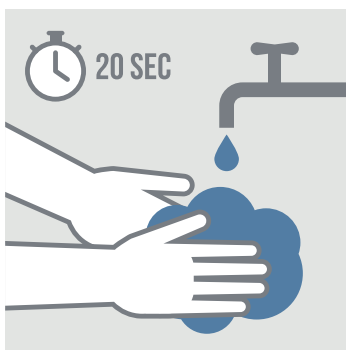
- ☑ Require any vendor or contractors, such as technology, audio-visual, and business center service providers (and any other contracted service provider) to establish and communicate new protocols.
- ☑ Vendors/contractors are to:
  - Follow all mandated CDC, federal, state and local guidelines and/or restrictions for services including daily health screening requirements.
  - Follow hotel/venue guidelines.
  - Require vendors to wear PPE while on property.
  - All equipment is to be sanitized before entering hotel/venue.
  - Where feasible, consider not having high-touch equipment be shared. If shared, high-touch equipment such as microphones, clickers/slide advancers, laptop computers and podiums will be disinfected after each speaker and session and on a daily basis.
  - All rented furniture or equipment will be properly sanitized after installation and prior guest use.



# COVID-19 PREVENTION TIPS



Instruct employees to stay home if they are sick and consider pre-screening employees for symptoms.



Wash hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer (minimum of 60% alcohol).



Maintain social distancing of at least six feet and avoid gatherings of groups of people.



Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and require employees wear appropriate PPE based on their roles.



Inform guests and provide training to employees on the importance of Covid-19 prevention measures.



Increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing in all public spaces with an emphasis on frequent contact surfaces.