



# Guidance for Commencement and Graduation Ceremonies

Commencement ceremonies and receptions before or after the graduation must adhere to the following requirements and modifications outlined in the California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) [Guidance for the Prevention of COVID-19 Transmission for Commencement/Graduation Ceremonies](#):

- All attendees, including school staff, performers, students, and families, are counted toward any occupancy capacity limit.
- If multiple ceremonies are planned for a single day, schools must allow at least **two hours** between ceremonies to prevent mixing across attendees.
- Limit attendee groups to a household unit. People from the same household do not need to be six feet apart. However, different household groups need to be six feet apart.
- Audience seating must be fixed or marked, with readily identifiable signs to indicate by section, row, and seat. Marked seats should clearly define space for individuals with appropriate space per person (no blanket reservations or group areas).

Please see the [CDPH's guidance for fully vaccinated people](#) for additional details.

## Attendance and Capacity Limitations

- Attendance must be limited to school staff, graduates, household members, and family members, and attendees must abide by travel limitations in the [CDPH Travel Advisory](#) and [SMCH travel recommendations](#).
- Only those who have pre-registered may attend. Staff or attendants must monitor the number of attendees entering the graduation event and confirm they have pre-registered.
- Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) should be discouraged from attending.
- Commencement ceremonies shall adhere to the attendance and capacity limitations, as outlined in the [CDPH Outdoor Seated Live Events and Performances Guidance](#), according to their tier.

## Health and Hygiene

- The venue must be cleaned and disinfected prior to and after the event, particularly high-touch surfaces (e.g., bathrooms). Consider cleaning high-touch surfaces (e.g.,

podium) between each speaker. Clean and disinfect shared equipment (e.g., microphones) between different users; consult equipment manufacturers regarding the appropriate method.

- Handshaking, elbow bumps, and hugs should not occur between different household groups.
- Consider limiting the sharing or exchanging of materials (such as throwing graduation caps, “sign-in” practices, programs, gifts, flowers).
- Districts and schools should, if possible, supply students with diplomas and caps and gowns in advance so they can arrive dressed and with their diplomas in hand.
- Graduates may be invited to walk across the stage individually and turn their tassel in lieu of receiving the diploma. Alternatively, diplomas and awards could be distributed if bestowing the awards and diplomas is done in a manner that reduces contact (e.g., placing each diploma and award on a table as the graduate walks by to retrieve it). Or, hand hygiene should be performed before and after touching objects and should be available in the appropriate locations.
- Discourage the audience from engaging in yelling, singing, chanting, booing, using noise makers that require the exhalation of air (e.g. vuvuzelas), and other similar practices that may increase the likelihood of transmission from contaminated exhaled droplets and aerosols.
- Schools/districts are required to comply with Cal/OSHA’s regulations for outbreaks and major outbreaks, including any relevant testing requirements for employees and reporting requirements.

## **Health Screening**

- Individuals who are sick or in isolation or quarantine must remain at home.
- All attendees should be screened or self-screen for fever and COVID-19 symptoms before leaving home for the event. Schools must communicate in writing to all who may attend that if they are feeling ill, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, they should not attend the graduation event.
- Set expectations, policies, and guidelines in advance, and reiterate them before the event day and at the start of the event to ensure overall health and safety.
- Consult with local public health departments, law enforcement, and legal counsel in planning any drive-in, drive-through, or recorded in-person events.

## **Face Coverings**

- The wearing of well-fitting face coverings is required at all times. Attendees may remove masks temporarily to eat and drink, if permitted, but only while maintaining

six feet of physical distancing.

- Speakers may remove masks during their remarks as long as they are at least six feet away from other attendees. Speakers should keep the time for comments brief to limit the time they are unmasked.
- Staff should enforce face covering compliance throughout the event.

## **Physical Distancing**

- Attendees who are not part of the same household must be seated at least six feet apart. Members of the same household are permitted to sit together and less than six feet apart.
- Encourage the orderly arrival and exit of attendees in a manner that encourages physically distancing at least six feet between households.
  - Graduates must enter and exit six feet apart from one another in a single line and must be seated six feet apart.
- Physical distancing measures include:
  - Signage or pavement/ground markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting from the graduation service to ensure physical distancing.
  - If a line forms outside of the graduation, staff should direct those waiting to maintain physical distancing.
  - Staff should direct people to help maintain physical distancing.
  - Staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting.
- There must be permanent or added barriers to create at least 12 feet between the space occupied by event attendees and the focal point (e.g., stage/podium).
  - If there is permanent seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.
- Mark six-foot sections to help attendees understand what six feet looks like. This can be done with tape, chalk, small flags, tape, balloons, etc. Indicate that people should stand on or by the markers and remain six feet from each other.

## **Other Considerations**

- Consider the timing of when ceremonies take place. Consider weather conditions, such as sun exposure, heat, and rain. Take appropriate precautions related to weather protection.
- Ensure facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.

## **Alternatives to Commencement Ceremonies and Celebrations**

The recommendations below are alternative options for commencement ceremonies and celebrations that involve more people than are permitted by the mandatory capacity caps. All commencement events must comply with state and local public health orders.

- **Virtual, recorded or live-streamed graduation ceremonies**, in which speeches, dedications, student submissions, and other festivities are live streamed to families/friends in their homes.
- **Sharing videos** of graduates' pictures, speeches, graduates' short messages to their classmates, or videos that highlight the graduates' school experiences.
- **Car parades** that are scheduled and planned in accordance with local health department requirements.
- **Drive-in, outdoor ceremonies** with graduates marching but families watching in their cars and listening to the event via local radio.
  - Only students and their household members who are not sick or in isolation or quarantine may arrive in the same vehicle.
    - All audience members must remain in their vehicle during the entire ceremony and refrain from getting out of their vehicle during the ceremony for any reason.
    - These ceremonies can be done at drive-in movie theaters, school parking lots, stadium parking lots, or other large parking lot venues that could be exclusively used for the graduation event. Multiple ceremonies or locations may be needed depending on the class size. Large projected screens and sound equipment may be required.
    - Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with physical distancing requirements.
- Use social or local media to highlight graduates (e.g., newspapers, websites, etc.).
- **Postponement**: This could be challenging because of the evolving nature of COVID-19 and carries the risk that circumstances may be no different later than at the planned time. Postponement would lead to additional disappointment if it occurs more than once. Postponing also increases the chance of conflicting with post-graduation plans.