



PLANNING SAFER EVENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

An event planning resource from MJ Sorority

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PLANNING SAFER EVENTS DURING COVID-19

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING ANY EVENTS

Every event comes with some risk; during a pandemic like COVID-19, that is truer than ever before. If you are willing to accept risk of liability, please proceed in reading this resource **in its entirety**. If you are unwilling to accept any risk of COVID-19 infection, you should only hold virtual events during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

Before we dig into the logistics of event planning during a global pandemic, I am reminded of a saying often repeated in our home growing up that used to cause intense eye-rolling from my sister and me: "just because you can do something doesn't mean you should." As we contemplate what types of events to hold in the coming school year, that axiom might be a good one to keep in the forefront of our minds at the beginning of the planning process, asking ourselves:

- 1) Can we meet? and
- 2) Should we meet?

Before resuming in-person experiences, event planners will need to thoughtfully consider safety and security risks for their event. Many factors can influence an event's risk profile, including the location of the venue, the purpose of the event, the community spread and vaccination rates, and the number of people attending. Today, we want to provide you with resources to consider as you address the threat of COVID-19 and manage the risk of transmission. Following the expertise of health officials and regulators, events will need to adopt new policies and procedures to minimize physical contact and maximize the health and well-being of their attendees. **This resource assumes there are no mandatory prohibitions affecting your event or gathering.**

WHY SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a *novel* coronavirus, meaning that we are still learning about its immediate and long-term effects. As sorority women, it is an integral part of our sisterhood to care for one another. In addition, we want to do what we can to care for those who support us as sorority women, such as the employees at events we attend, our chapter and house corporation volunteers, and others we come in contact with who could be more at risk of infection and potential long-term consequences of COVID-19.

Because we care about each other and our communities, should we decide to hold in-person events during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that we follow the guidelines to make them as safe as possible.



BEGINNING CONSIDERATIONS ONCE YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PLAN AN EVENT

With the FDA emergency-use authorization of two COVID-19 vaccines and the recent full FDA approval of the Pfizer vaccine, the situation is markedly different than last fall. However, how the impacts your event planning depends largely on how vaccinated your community is and whether or not your college/university has mandated vaccines for students and staff. If your college/university has mandated vaccination, the scope of your considerations required for planning events is less restrictive than for those campuses where vaccinations have not been required and/or community vaccination rates are low.

Event planners should assume that during a pandemic, when there is COVID-19 prevalence in virtually every locale, every participant could transmit the virus. Because everyone is a potential transmission risk, taking appropriate safety and risk management measures is crucial, as is communicating the requirements and responsibilities during these unprecedented circumstances.

It is our opinion that the best risk managers are the individuals who are best informed; for that reason, we think our clients' first, and most important, step in event planning should be communication. Communication about the risks, about what you are doing to mitigate the risks, and about the requirements necessary so that the event can happen as safely as possible.

In your frequent communication, encourage staff and attendees to take everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19. This includes:

- + Getting the COVID-19 vaccine for those eligible.
- + Cleaning your hands often.
- + Avoiding close contact with people and practice distancing.
- + Staying home when you are sick.
- + Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- + Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.
- + Wearing masks/face coverings.

Not all events are created equal when it comes to risk of COVID-19 infection; the following risk management measures create safer events in the time of COVID-19:

- + Outdoor events are safer than indoor ones.
- + Encourage masks unless everyone is vaccinated.
- + If inside, increase ventilation and air movement.



PLANNING YOUR EVENT

Keeping the above risk factors in mind, we have created the following checklist of things to consider when planning sorority events in the time of COVID-19. Because the virus infection rates vary so widely from location to location and because vaccination rates are so different based on each community, we cannot create any black-and-white risk management rules about events in the time of COVID-19, other than the following:

- + Ensure that you are following the state and local health department guidelines regarding holding events, and
- + Ensure that you are following the policies and guidelines from your national organization.

This checklist is only a list of items that we are encouraging our clients to think through as they plan their events; it is **not** a concrete set of requirements for all events.

BEFORE THE EVENT: Safety Steps to Consider	
	Check the local and state government public health website to confirm that you can hold your event and to see what restrictions apply.
	Ensure that you are following any and all guidelines set forth by your national organization when it comes to event planning.
	Check with your campus Greek Life office to see what restrictions apply.
	<p>Ensure that the venue is adhering to COVID-19 precautions (as detailed by the CDC), including your local municipality. Some examples of questions to ask the venue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is there sufficient handwashing stations and hand sanitizer available? + Is your staff enforcing social distancing? + Are your employees being required to stay home if they exhibit any symptoms? + What is your current cleaning and disinfection schedule? + Are your employees vaccinated? If not, will they be wearing masks at all times?
	Adjust event capacity and/or modify event space to enforce social distancing (e.g. placing tape on floors, setup spaced seating, etc.). Remember that the six feet between people only works when individuals are stationary. You may need up to twelve feet of space per person in event of the attendees moving around.
	Depending on the event, consider "shifts" of attendees or timing windows to reduce attendee density and allow for cleaning between "shifts."



	<p>Message all attendees before arrival, advising them of any policies that will be requiring (e.g. masks, social distancing, etc.). Require attendees to do self-assessment for symptoms prior to admittance. Suggested screening questions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ In the last 14 days have you travelled from overseas or a COVID-19 hotspot?+ Have you been in close contact with a person who is positive for COVID-19?+ Are you an active COVID-19 case?+ Are you currently, or have you recently experienced cough, fever, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, fatigue or shortness of breath? <p>If yes to any of the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Ask the attendee to stay home or refuse entry to the event and refer the person to first aid, medical services if necessary.
	<p>If event is indoors, require CDC-recommended face coverings to be worn by all attendees and event staff unless most attendees are vaccinated.</p>
	<p>Communicate to potential attendees that attendance to the event is not required and, if possible, offer a virtual alternative to those who cannot or do not feel comfortable attending the event in person.</p>
	<p>Prior to event, require that attendees self-certify that they will comply with the event's safety policies and procedures including wearing face coverings (if applicable) and that violation of policies will cause removal from the event. Assign individuals to enforce these rules during the event.</p>
	<p>If food and beverage service cannot be eliminated, consider pre-packaged, single-serve options. Consider avoiding all communal buffet-style meals unless one assigned server is the only one serving food. Given difficulties around consuming beverages and food while wearing face coverings, consider added physical distancing to allow for temporary removal of face coverings in designated areas only.</p>
	<p>If applicable, post signage at event entrances indicating that face coverings and/or other personal protective equipment must be worn as a condition to enter the facility (CDC printables here).</p>



DURING THE EVENT: Steps to Consider

	Depending on vaccination status, attendees should cover their nose and mouth with an approved face cover when around others. Unless stated otherwise by local regulations, exceptions are for children under two, persons with breathing issues, or someone who is unconscious/incapacitated or unable to remove their face cover independently.
	Per physical distancing guidelines, unvaccinated event-goers should stay at least six feet from one another, even if they are wearing face coverings. Provide culturally appropriate messages and materials to prohibit certain actions like handshakes or high-fives that are common at many events but could facilitate the spread of COVID-19.
	Have your assigned individuals that you identified prior to the event enforce the precautionary rules during the event.
	Modify attendee/staff density to enforce all safety protocols, including six-foot physical distancing requirements in all venue spaces where attendees congregate — including restrooms, and any areas where people congregate or line up, such as entrances and exits. This may include temporary modifications to the space (e.g., closing some sink stations to create more spacing, limiting bathroom usage, lining up to enter and exit the venue, and modifying seating and standing arrangements).
	Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces like tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc. using CDC cleaning and disinfecting guidelines .
	Provide access to hand-washing stations with soap and water or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if the former is unavailable. Provide instructions on proper handwashing at handwashing stations (printables available here).
	Create signage outlining face coverings and/or other personal protective equipment rules, physical distancing requirements, and other COVID-19 specific procedures; ensure any messaging surrounding COVID-19 recognizes and addresses cultural, language, and/or disability barriers.
	Assign individuals to cleaning tasks performed before, during, and after the event. Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces like tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc. before the event using CDC cleaning and disinfecting guidelines .

AFTER THE EVENT: Steps to Consider

	Keep record of attendees and their contact information should any infections arise and attendees need to be contacted. Example language here .
	Keep record of any waivers or agreements that you asked attendees to sign in case they are needed in the future. See additional resource regarding waivers at the end of this resource.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT EVENTS DURING COVID-19

What is my liability in holding a chapter event during COVID-19?

In non-pandemic times, you (meaning as an individual or an organization) can be sued for anything at any time. The question becomes how likely it is that you will be found negligent and be required to pay out a settlement or judgement. While there are no clear, black-and-white answers to this question because it varies so widely depending on the circumstances, we can offer the following things to consider when it comes to liability and COVID-19:

Legal liability exists when:

- + The wrongdoer (the sorority, chapter, house corporation, or any officers of those organizations) is found guilty of “negligent conduct” meaning they breached a duty owed to the injured party
- + The injured party suffers actual damages such as getting ill with the virus
- + The wrongdoer’s negligent conduct is the likely cause of the injury or damage

What actions during the COVID-19 crisis could possibly lead to the insured (sorority/chapter and/or house corporation) being found legally liable for an injury from the virus? Before we lay out some examples, it is always important to remember that society and the courts generally only require that a person or entity act “as a reasonable and prudent person” and using their best, and most informed, judgement act accordingly.

Examples related to events might include:

- + Holding an event at a venue that is clearly not adhering to COVID-19 precautions
- + Forcing members to attend events instead of clearly making attendance optional
- + Failure to adhere to required health and prevention guidelines or enforce prevention guidelines at the event
- + No efforts to communicate and educate your members on the health and prevention guidelines
- + Holding events that are not in compliance with your state and local health department guidelines for events
- + Indiscriminate application of rules and guidelines for the members of how to safely hold events

There are numerous other scenarios; however, the major point is that there will be advice from experts like the CDC on how to follow health and prevention guidelines to keep your chapter house safe from spreading COVID-19. The key is to follow the health and prevention guidelines, educate your members on these guidelines, and put measures in place to ensure



their compliance of these guidelines. Should someone get injured or ill and allege they did so at your event, you will be able to confidently defend your position by having followed these best practices.

What is my liability as an officer/advisor?

As we laid out above, you can be sued for anything at anytime. The insurance program exists to protect its officers and volunteers so long as they are following the rules and guidelines of their national organization. So if you were named in a lawsuit while following your sorority's policies regarding event planning in the time of COVID-19, the sorority's insurance policy would most likely protect you as a named insured under the policy.

If you engaged in behavior or activities that would be considered "intentional or criminal acts" (i.e. situations where you meant to cause damage or bodily injury), there would be no coverage under the sorority's insurance policy (or likely under any other insurance policy for that matter because "intentional and criminal acts" are exclusions under most general liability insurance policies).

What is our liability if one person contracts COVID-19?

The only type of event that is 100 percent safe from liability arising out of a COVID-19 infection is a virtual event. That being said, as we laid out in the discussion in the first question above, if you are following the guidelines laid out by your national organization, as well as your local health department in terms of preventing the spread of the virus, you have a better defense in the event of a claim.

Because most of us have never lived through a global pandemic before, we do not know how the courts will react to these types of lawsuits. Several states are proposing ways to limit the liability arising out of COVID-19 lawsuits for companies and other organizations, but we do not know how those will impact potential claims at this point. Additionally, those laws will likely vary from state to state.

Your best defense is to follow the rules and guidelines put in place by your national organization, by your associated university, by the [CDC](#) and [your local health department](#).

ADDENDUM: ADDITIONAL RELATED EVENT PLANNING RESOURCES

Resource Title

[Participant Waiver/Release – COVID-19
TEMPLATE](#)

[COVID-19 Poster/Signage](#)

[CDC Event Planning Tool](#)

Refer to our COVID-19 Resource Center for continually updated resources, communications, and webinars: <https://mjsorority.com/covid-19-response>.