



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20230

October 22, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR: NOAA Line Office (LO) Assistant Administrators  
NOAA Staff Office (SO) Directors

FROM: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance for Widely Attended Gatherings

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide COVID-19 related guidance for NOAA group travel and conference organizers when considering official group travel or employee attendance at widely attended gatherings. This guidance is applicable to gatherings that include professional conferences, training seminars, and in-person meetings with attendance of at least 10 people in areas of [high or substantial community COVID-19 transmission level](#), as assessed using [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) tracking data](#), and at least 30 people in areas of moderate community transmission level. Note that this guidance is supplementary to [normal conference and group travel approval processes](#). Note also that this guidance is not intended to apply to NOAA-hosted events. For NOAA-hosted events, organizers should consult their respective office leadership to ensure proper coordination with NOAA Headquarters and the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) Office of Health Services (OHS).

While medical science, treatment, and vaccination guidance continue to evolve regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased demand and opportunities for group travel and larger in-person meetings, as well as resumption of in-person conference attendance. Additionally, while [NOAA Travel Advisory \(NTA\) 21-5](#) restored official travel approval to pre-pandemic levels and provided general pandemic-related guidance for travel approving officials and travelers, we have received more specific concerns regarding considerations for employee travel to, and attendance at, widely attended gatherings.

When considering official employee group travel or in-person attendance at a widely attended gathering, there are generally two main assessment conditions, based on [COVID-19 case load indicators](#) and supporting [CDC tracking data](#):

1. Event is in a Substantial / High local area of transmission
2. Event is in a Moderate / Low local area of transmission

Organizers may generally assess an event location's transmission level up to seven days prior to an event when considering additional health and safety protocols and/or options suggested below.

For events located in areas of Moderate and/or Low transmission, continue to follow guidance for vaccinated versus unvaccinated employees as found in [NTA 21-5](#) and the [associated FAQs](#).



For events in areas of Substantial and/or High transmission, group travel and conference organizers, as well as supervisors and travel authorizing officials, should consider whether the travel is essential for the operation of their respective office(s) or NOAA. If the group travel, in-person meeting or event is not essential, then the relevant decision maker should consider alternative options such as virtual participation or not approving the travel or attendance at the event.

In conjunction with following general [NOAA Health and Safety Protocol Guidance](#), decision makers should also evaluate if the event will take additional precautions to help ensure the health and safety of participating employees, such as requirements that:

- All in-person participants are fully vaccinated (Note: 100% of in-person attendees being fully vaccinated provides the greatest relative risk reduction for an event).
- Venues allow for appropriate social distancing
- Attendees are subject to testing (e.g., negative tests every 72 hours, rapid tests on a daily basis, etc.)
- Large gatherings occur outdoors (preferred over indoors)

Widely attended event organizers may also consider [post-event self-monitoring, testing, self-isolation, and/or quarantine protocols per CDC travel guidance](#) prior to attendees returning to the office.

If after considering the above, uncertainty exists about whether or not employees may or should attend an in-person event, group travel and conference organizers are encouraged to forward their planned event health and safety protocol plan to OMAO OHS (email: [gary.montgomery@noaa.gov](mailto:gary.montgomery@noaa.gov); ph: 206-240-2790) regarding adequacy of intended traveler health and safety protocols.

---

As a reminder, all Federal employees are required to be fully vaccinated unless they have an approved Reasonable Accommodation. If you have not yet started the vaccination process, we encourage you to do so immediately. [COVID-19 vaccines](#) are widely available, safe, effective, and reduce the risk of severe illness. For additional resources, including scheduling a vaccination appointment in your area, please visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

NOAA will continue to provide updates as guidance evolves, and we encourage you to visit [NOAA's COVID-19 Health and Wellness Information for Employees site](#) and [NOAA's OHCS Current Event: COVID-19 intranet site](#) for the most up-to-date information. We appreciate your efforts and thank you for following these steps to keep our workplaces and communities safe.

cc: LO/SO Deputies  
LO Chief Financial Officers  
LO/SO Chiefs of Staff  
NOAA Finance / Travel Office  
Group and Conference Travel organizers