



MEETING GUIDELINES: COVID-19

Guidance for **organizers** holding meetings during the 2019/2020 coronavirus outbreak.

Last updated 12 March 2020: Recent information at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

BACKGROUND

Coronaviruses are a large family of respiratory viruses. Some cause less-severe disease, such as the common cold, and others more severe disease such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Whilst the current outbreak of COVID-19 is still being investigated, it appears to be moderately infectious and able to be passed from human to human, primarily by droplet spread, as for other respiratory viruses. Whilst many cases will be of a mild illness, a small percentage progress to more severe illness and pneumonia.

For inter-governmental meetings, the Secretariats are invited to share the following information with the Bureaus/Presidency of the body concerned to facilitate the adoption of decisions on the meetings.

DECISIONS BY HOST COUNTRY

On 28 February 2020, the Swiss federal authorities informed UN Geneva that due to the spread of COVID-19, the Federal Council categorized the situation in Switzerland as 'special' in terms of the Epidemics Act, and **decided to prohibit, with immediate effect and until 15 March 2020, gatherings of more than 1,000 people.**

On 11 March 2020, the government of the Canton of Geneva [decided](#) that all events, either public or private, that bring together simultaneously **less than 1'000 but more than 100 participants** (number of people at peak attendance), are prohibited. **Events where the participants are seated and where a sufficient distance between them can be ensured are exempt from this ban. Sufficient distance is defined as two meters.**

The government also recommends that the cantonal authorities be informed (by email at manifestations-ASU@etat.ge.ch or by telephone at 022 546 51 04) that the meeting is taking place, and that in addition to ensuring a safe distance, the following be undertaken:

- Participants who have travelled areas identified as at risk in the previous 15 days, should be asked to abstain from attending the event.
- Participants over 65 years old, persons with high blood pressure or suffering from a chronic disease such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular or respiratory disease, and persons undergoing medical therapy that could weaken their immune system should also refrain from attending.
- Traceability of contact persons should be ensured by keeping a record of all meeting participants and a means to contact them. (Note: The Indico meeting registration system in use at the Palais des Nations does provide this assurance since all meeting participants are required to provide an email address at registration.)
- No side event, reception or coffee break outside the meeting room should be held.

More information is available on the Canton's [website](#). The decision to hold a meeting or event which respects all the above conditions rests with the organizers. However, the cantonal health office is entitled to ban a meeting or event that could lead to an increased risk of spreading COVID-19, or to set additional conditions.

For meetings held at the Palais des Nations or Palais Wilson, the Division of Conference Management is ready to consolidate all information on planned meetings of more than 100 participants and send them to



the cantonal authorities on your behalf. Should you want your meetings to be included in this list, kindly write to anna.banchieri@un.org

RISK AND CRITICALITY ASSESSMENT

Organizers are requested to carry out their own risk assessment and consider postponing, cancelling or scaling down. Based on guidance received from the United Nations Department of Operational Support, the World Health Organization and Swiss authorities (federal and cantonal), the United Nations Office at Geneva recommends that they consider the following in doing so:

1. The latest information on the epidemiological COVID-19 situation, available at : <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
2. The latest information on the situation in Switzerland : <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov.html>
3. Participation of representatives not based in Geneva. Organizers should try to limit attendance to Geneva-based participants. If not, organizers should consider whether meeting participants may have visited or transited through areas with large outbreaks. A number of rooms at the Palais des Nations and Palais Wilson are equipped for remote participation through video-conference. UN Geneva's Meetings Management Services can be contacted at +41 (0) 22 917 36 68 or by email at mms@un.org to verify whether video-conferencing capability is available in the allocated meeting room. Interpretation can also be provided for remote participation, if certain technical conditions are met. Meeting organizers are invited to send enquiries in this regard to videconfint@un.org
4. Impact of postponing or cancelling the meeting. Organizers should consider:
 - a. Whether the event is very critical (the impact of not holding it would be imminent and would disrupt operations and critical areas of work, or is critical to ensure the safety of staff and premises)
 - b. Whether the event is moderately critical (instances where it will take 1-2 years to recover from the impact of not holding the event, including meeting outcomes that would impact on other intergovernmental processes)
 - c. Whether the event is not critical (instances where there might be some short term impacts if the event is not held but those might be recoverable within a year)
 - d. The availability of conference services at later dates and financial implications of postponement.
5. Set up of the meeting room. Meeting organizers should also consider whether large meeting rooms are available that will allow participants not to sit within two meters of each other for periods longer than 15 minutes.

Attached is a document prepared by United Nations Headquarters which includes a more detailed risk assessment and a decision tree flowchart.

The Geneva Canton authorities can also assist with this risk assessment and can be contacted (by email again at manifestations-ASU@etat.ge.ch - the subject line should indicate that this relates to a meeting organized by an entity of the UN system) . Naturally, the Canton is facing many requests for advice. As UNOG is also liaising closely with local authorities, organizers of meetings to be held at the Palais des Nations can also contact UNOG in the first instance by writing to dcmdirector@un.org.



ADDITIONAL STEPS TO BE TAKEN

MEETING REGISTRATION

A notice has been posted on the Indico.un.org website as follows: “WHO has declared a global health emergency in relation to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. UNOG is closely monitoring the situation and reserves the right to implement health checks at meetings held on its premises, should this be deemed necessary”. In addition, a new field has been added on registration pages encouraging participants - for the purpose of traceability only, and on a voluntary basis – to indicate the countries they have visited or through which they have transited during the two weeks preceding their arrival at the Palais des Nations.

PROVISION OF GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS/DELEGATIONS

1. The Chair/President of each body should consider asking delegations to send only one or two representatives at most to attend the meetings in person, so as to minimize the number of participants in the room at any given time. She/he may want to remind all delegations that all public meetings held at the Palais des Nations can be followed live on: <https://listen-live.unog.ch/>
2. The Chair/President should also inform delegations that the Swiss federal authorities have identified categories of people as particularly at risk, and ask delegations to consider carefully the participation of anyone fitting the following description:
 - People with any of these pre-existing conditions:
 - High blood pressure
 - Diabetes
 - Cardiovascular diseases
 - Chronic respiratory diseases
 - Diseases or treatments that weaken the immune system
 - Cancer, and/or
 - People over the age of 65
3. The Chair/President may want to deliver an introductory brief at the beginning of each session, along the following lines:

“As you are aware the World Health Organization has declared the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. I urge all attendees to follow the guidance provided by the local authorities and Secretariat, and which includes:

- *To refrain from shaking hands;*
- *To not attend the meeting if you are unwell, have a fever, cough or respiratory symptoms;*
- *To leave empty seats between you and other participants, if the room allows it;*
- *To contact the UN Medical Service immediately by telephone (at +41 (0) 22 917 25 20) or the UN Security Control Centre (at +41 (0) 22 917 2900, or 112 from any internal phone) if you are unwell and have been to an ‘at risk’ location for coronavirus in the last 14 days; and*
- *To undertake regular preventive measures such as cough etiquette and regular handwashing.*

These measures are for your safety, and to safeguard the wellbeing of us all.

4. Leaflets, posters and rollups have been printed and are on display at UN Geneva with basic information on behaviours that can reduce the spread of the virus and where to seek further information and medical assistance. UN Geneva has also shared this information material with the UN Communications Group, which includes representatives of all UN entities present in Geneva.



Digital copies of information flyers (specific to the Palais des Nations) are [available here on iSeek](#). (If you do not have iSeek access, you may request this by email to olivia.starrenburg@un.org).

HEALTHCARE FOR MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Hand sanitizers are made available in large meeting rooms at the Palais des Nations by conference officers. Participants and meeting organizers are reminded that hand washing with soap and water is also efficient and recommended.

In the event that you or a meeting participant has fever, cough or respiratory symptoms AND has been to a high-risk location or cared for someone with COVID-19, they may be considered a suspect COVID-19 case. The person should immediately isolate themselves and **call first** before seeing a healthcare provider.

For medical emergencies: At the Palais des Nations, call the UN Security Control Centre on +41 (0)22 917 2900 (or 112 from any internal phone). Outside the Palais des Nations, in Switzerland: dial 144, and in France, dial 15.

If a participant is unwell in a meeting room:

- If the person is in severe distress or could be considered a suspect COVID-19 case (due to displaying fever, cough or respiratory symptoms AND having been to a high-risk location or cared for someone with COVID-19), the event organizers should contact UNOG Security Services by dialing 112 from any internal phone or +41 (0) 22 917 2900 (24 hrs) from their mobile phone. Security will be dispatched to the location to provide further assistance, and they will also contact UN Medical Services. If a suspect case of COVID-19 is determined, those seated in close proximity to the affected person will be identified and peoples' details will be collected for additional traceability.
- If the person is unwell for any other reason and not in severe distress, they can contact the UN Medical Service or another medical provider (see below).

Medical services: The UN Medical Service can be reached on +41 (0) 22 917 2520. It is located in Building S (Level -1 via door C6) and open for consultations from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. A list of some medical facilities in Geneva is available [online here](#). Remember: if you or a meeting participant has fever, cough or respiratory symptoms AND has been to a high-risk location or cared for someone with COVID-19, they should immediately isolate themselves and **call first** before seeing a healthcare provider.

PREVENTION AND GENERAL PRECAUTIONS

The same guidance for influenza or any of the respiratory viruses applies equally to COVID-19, as below:

1. Avoid being exposed to respiratory viruses:
 - Avoid close contact with people who are ill with fever, cough or respiratory symptoms.
 - Wash or sanitize your hands frequently – this is one of the most effective measures available.
 - Note there is no need for well people in low risk environments to wear a mask
2. Avoid spreading respiratory viruses if you are unwell
 - Stay at home or in your accommodation if you become unwell, develop a fever or other respiratory symptoms. Seek medical care but first always call ahead to your healthcare provider.
 - Maintain your distance from others – at least two meters;
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing and use the nearest waste bin to dispose of the tissue after use. If you do not have a disposable tissue cough or sneeze into your elbow;
 - Wash or sanitize your hands frequently – after coughing, before preparing food or eating, after toilet use, after contact with ill persons, or during exposure to high traffic public areas.

Coronavirus 24-hour hotline: +41 58 463 00 00

For further information: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>