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The Return to In-Person Events

COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for the Events Industry

with **AP media** ～ vaheala® ANP SAFETY

Introduction

Pre-Event Safety Measures

Choosing an Event Venue

Questions to Ask Potential Venues

Getting Your Event Venue Ready

Defining Your Safety Protocol

Communicating Your Safety Measures

Event Travel Guidelines

On-Site Safety Measures

Ensuring Attendee & Staff Safety

Communicating Your Safety Measures

Post-Event Safety Measures

Should We Provide End-of-Event Testing?

What Happens if Attendees Test Positive?

Consultants

Introduction

For marketers, 2020 will go down as the year that changed everything. COVID-19 crossed the globe, in-person gatherings were deemed unsafe (and even illegal), and infectious disease experts developed vaccines in record-breaking time.

As the vaccine began rolling out, marketers had questions. What would the vaccine mean for getting back to in-person events? Would it mean we'd be clear to host them in 2021? If not, when? And if so, what safety measures should we take to ensure a level of comfort for both attendees and staff?

A post-pandemic events strategy will obviously require a lot of careful thought and planning. That's where these guidelines come in. We organized this document by the three main stages of the event lifecycle: pre-event, on-site, and post-event.

To provide you the most well-rounded and educated information possible, we collaborated with both health experts and event industry leaders to answer your questions.

And it wouldn't be guidelines if we didn't include some disclaimers. These are general guidelines for maintaining COVID-19 safety at in-person events. Requirements and action items for specific events may vary.

Things will continue to change, and you may not be able to control parts of your post-pandemic events strategy. But what you can control: the level of clarity you provide staff and attendees around the protocol that works best for your events.

We're also aware of how quickly COVID-19 has evolved since it first surfaced. These guidelines are subject to change as we continue learning more about the virus.

Pre-Event
Safety Measures

Marketers, business professionals, and consumers alike are eager to get back to in-person events. As we think about what events look like in the future, there are obviously a lot of questions. And while we begin identifying how to host in-person events, we all start in the same place: considering what safety measures to take in the pre-event planning process.

In the past, we'd do our due diligence to choose the best event venue for our audience and event goals. And while we *may* have asked questions about facility cleanliness and filtration systems, those will quickly become must-ask questions.

Similarly, our pre-pandemic events would most likely include emergency preparedness information — but it may have been among all the other fine print or frequently asked questions. Moving forward, communicating safety protocol will be key for attendees to feel safe. They will be more front and center than ever before.

In this section, we discuss these two topics — choosing an event venue and communicating your safety measures — as well as getting your venue ready and event travel guidelines.

Choosing an Event Venue

Picking the right venue for your event has always been a top priority. Things you may consider include location and accessibility, room capacity, room layout, amenities, and more.

Moving forward, though, choosing an event venue may require a more critical eye than pre-pandemic. You'll likely want to consider venue characteristics that may not have been front and center previously, like filtration systems, outdoor space, and cleaning processes.

With all of this (and more) in mind, there are new questions you'll want to ask venue managers when scoping out potential event venues.

Questions to Ask Potential Event Venues

Cleaning & Filtration

- [ ] What are the air exchanges per hour in the venue? Can we increase that? How much of the air is recirculated versus fresh?

- [ ] What number MERV filters does the venue have? (The American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists recommend MERV 13 or higher.)

- [ ] What are your current cleaning processes? How have they changed since pre-pandemic?

- [ ] Do you use an electrostatic sprayer or equivalent to disinfect all surfaces each night?

- [ ] How often are your event spaces cleaned during events?

- [ ] How many staff members will be cleaning the space while we're using it?

- [ ] For multi-day events, what is your cleaning process at the end of the day and/or beginning of the day?

- [ ] What chemicals do you use for cleaning? Are they listed on the EPA's List N (approved disinfectants for COVID-19)?

  - [ ] What is the contact time for those chemicals (the amount of time needed to be effective against COVID-19), and is this time being achieved?

  - [ ] What PPE is required during cleaning?

  - [ ] Does the public have to be away during cleaning?

Facilities & Accessibility

☐ How much space do we have for our check-in line?

☐ What are the entrance and exit points available for our space? Is there more than one point available to usher traffic in one way and out another?

☐ What outdoor space is available for our event?

☐ Do you offer touchless disinfecting stations?

☐ How many doors are in the venue? Can we prop the doors open or do they have to be pushed open?

☐ Are there (or can we place) arrows on the ground or signage directing traffic flow?

☐ How many restrooms are in the facility? How often are they cleaned?

Event Management

☐ Do you require in-house catering or allow third-party vendors?

☐ Do you require in-house A/V or allow third-party vendors?

☐ If you provide third-party vendors, are they required to follow the same safety protocol as the venue?

☐ How many staff members work an event of this size, both in-house and third-party?

☐ Can you provide more information on the safety policies of any third-party vendors you work with? Are vendors tested for COVID-19?

☐ What is your current policy around serving alcohol?

Getting Your Event Venue Ready

You've done your research. You've chosen an event venue. The next step: Ensuring you have everything you need to properly set up the event venue in the safest way possible.

- [ ] **Cleaning requirements:** Venue staff should have this under control, but you may choose to connect with the venue manager or head of housekeeping at certain times to confirm they're adhering to the guidelines.

- [ ] **Disinfecting stations:** If possible, set these sensor-activated stations (either hand-washing or hand-sanitizing stations) at entrance and exit points, as well as at tables or in other common areas. Encourage staff and attendees to bring their own hand sanitizer if that's more comforting for them.

- [ ] **Restrooms:** Confirm with your venue manager which restrooms are dedicated only for your event attendees. Place the appropriate signage by these restrooms. This is especially important if you're hosting an event in a large space (e.g., a hotel), where there could potentially be multiple events happening in one building.

- [ ] **Seating arrangements:** If you have particular seating arrangements you'd like to stick to (e.g., classroom seating with two empty seats in between each attendee or rounds with half the usual number of seats), confirm with the venue manager they'll be ready to accommodate this.

☐ **Food and beverage:** It's possible we won't see a buffet for some time — if ever again. However you choose to offer food and beverage, ensure it's set up properly (to your expectations). This may mean you only want to serve food and beverage outdoors or when seated. At this time, we don't recommend attendees walk around with refreshments. In addition, if you're looking to maintain social distance at your event, decide whether or not you want to serve alcohol.

☐ **Paperless options:** We recommend providing physical handouts, like event programs or worksheets, digitally before the event even begins. In addition, consider sending any event swag directly to the attendees' homes ahead of time.

☐ **Communication devices:** We recommend that your staff use dedicated communication devices (such as dedicated walkie-talkies), rather than shared devices to avoid spreading germs. In addition, using personal phones may actually contribute to the spread of germs in an event setting. We also recommend that each speaker has their own dedicated mic, if needed.

Defining Your Safety Protocol

Although it's not the most exciting part of event marketing and management, it's always been important to define safety or emergency response protocols. Today, it's even more important to define and document this.

Attendees want to know safety protocols for two reasons. One, they want to know what's required of them to attend your event. And two, they want to determine if they'll feel safe attending.

As an event organizer, you should ask yourself two things to start defining your protocols.

1. What are my protocols?

2. How will I manage protocols?

The elements of your COVID-19 safety protocol may include:

Testing & Timing Requirements

☐ Are we requiring a negative COVID-19 test to enter the event?

☐ What type(s) of tests are accepted (e.g., PCR, antigen, antibody, etc.)?

☐ When do attendees need to take a test (before or at the event)?

☐ When are results required (within 72 hours of the event start or in real time)?

☐ If on-site testing is part of the event, who is managing that process and what medical requirements need to be addressed?

☐ Who pays for testing?

☐ Do test results need to be verified or does at-home collection suffice?

Vaccine Requirements

☐ Do people who have been vaccinated still need to test?

☐ What is acceptable proof of vaccine?

Symptom Checks

☐ Do we want to require a COVID-19 symptom screening survey at check-in?

☐ If anyone starts having symptoms, how will they report those symptoms?

☐ Do we want to perform temperature checks at the beginning and/or during the event?

PPE Usage

☐ What PPE will we require for both staff and attendees?

☐ Under what circumstances is PPE required or not required?

☐ How will we handle situations where PPE may interfere (e.g., eating and drinking)?

Social Distancing

☐ Will we ask attendees to socially distance?

☐ How will we measure distance (e.g., through a device)?

☐ If social distancing is not part of the official protocol, what is acceptable?

Report Violations

☐ Will attendees have a way to report when protocols are not followed?

☐ How will we handle protocol violations?

☐ How will we communicate protocol violations?

Communicating Your Safety Measures

Emergency preparedness has always been an important part of event marketing and management. Pre-pandemic, we may have included details in the fine print or frequently asked questions.

Now, it's not just important — it can make or break how successful your event is. Your attendees and staff alike will want to understand the safety measures you're taking. They will want to know that attending your event won't leave them feeling under the weather. And because of that, you'll need to communicate your emergency and safety protocol more transparently than ever before.

Pre-event, there are a number of places you'll want to communicate your COVID-19 safety protocol.

Event Page

If there's one place your audience needs to see all event details, it's your event page. Whether you dedicate an entire page to emergency and safety protocols or include a question on your frequently asked questions page, the end result should be the same: transparent details about what those protocols are.

Questions you should be prepared to answer include, but may not be limited to:

- What safety measures are you taking to ensure the health of attendees?

- How will you communicate test statuses to individuals and all other attendees?

- Does the venue have effective cleaning processes and filtration systems?

- Will you require attendees to provide proof of vaccination or negative test results?

- Will you require attendees to submit to a COVID test on-site?

- Will you require attendees to wear masks?

- What happens if I test positive on-site?

- What should I do if I test positive immediately after the event?

Promotions

Your promotional emails are often the very first attendee touchpoint in your event experience. While you don't necessarily have to address safety protocol in every single promotional email, we do recommend addressing it early to quickly minimize any audience concerns.

There are three ways we recommend you accomplish this:

1. Dedicate space in your initial invitation. This can be as simple as a one-sentence statement that links out to your event page for more information.

2. If you're hosting a large, multi-day event, consider dedicating an entire email to safety information. For events crossing multiple days, attendees may have more concerns about safety — and as an event organizer, you may have more safety measures you're planning to take. This may warrant a dedicated email to show them how you plan on keeping them healthy and safe.

3. In follow-up emails, include safety information as a recurring P.S. or in the footer. Again, this can be as simple as a one-sentence statement that links out to your event page for more information.

Additionally, other promotional channels should include health and safety information. Other channels may include, but are not limited to: social media, advertising, newsletters, and blog or news articles.

Registration Form

When your invitees have decided to register, you will likely need them to agree to your COVID-19 safety protocol. Just like you could include your usual terms and conditions checkbox, we recommend including a COVID-19 terms and conditions checkbox on your registration form.

Make this field required to indicate they've read, understood, and agreed to the health and safety protocol you've set for the event. Include a link to the terms and conditions page or document that clearly outlines the protocol.

Confirmation Email

Once your invitees have registered for your event, they've likely decided that it sounds safe enough for them. However, that doesn't mean you should completely stop talking about your safety measures.

In your event confirmation email, we recommend including a short statement (even one sentence that links to your event page) that reiterates your commitment to their health and safety, as well as mentions any action items on their end.

Reminder Emails

When you've gotten to the point of reminder emails, you don't have to go into detail about your health and safety information. Your audience has likely already read through the details and decided they feel safe with what you have planned.

This is where you should remind your attendees of any immediate or critical action items they need to take once on-site. For example, if they are required to wear a mask or bring proof of vaccination, remind them. Include information on what will happen if they don't follow your required protocol.

Event Travel Guidelines

As the COVID-19 virus evolves, so will the travel guidelines outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We are only recommending travel to events when the CDC's guidelines indicate that it's safe.

Please consult the CDC's guidelines before traveling.

On-Site Safety Measures

It seems like everywhere we go these days, we're asked to complete a quick COVID screening questionnaire, get our temperature checked, or — for instances like traveling — provide proof of a negative COVID test.

As people begin planning for the return of in-person gatherings, including events, marketers are among those wondering what on-site safety measures will be necessary. Should we require safety measures like the ones listed above? And given all the privacy laws (such as HIPAA), is it even legal for us to take these safety measures?

In this section, we'll address ways to ensure attendee and staff safety, plus how to communicate your safety measures once on-site.

Ensuring Attendee & Staff Safety

Earlier in your planning process, you defined your health and safety protocols. You decided whether or not to offer on-site testing, require proof of vaccination, screen for symptoms, and more. Now, you need to put all of that into operation.

There's no single way to operationalize your health and safety protocol. The system you choose will depend on what safety measures you're taking and who needs to know what. Although everything in this section can vary based on your unique program, below is a checklist of ways you can start to think about operationalizing your protocol.

☐ **Confirm on-site testing options.** If, as an event organizer, you want to provide testing and get access to test results, each attendee and staff member taking a test must sign a HIPAA release and authorization. This allows the medical provider, lab, or other covered entity to share patient data (test results for the event) with you. If you decide instead to request attendees to self-report their test results, they must sign an attestation indicating the results are theirs and accurate, as well as a disclaimer stating that the event organizer is not responsible for decisions made based on self-reported data.

☐ **Decide how to handle positive on-site tests.** If you provide on-site testing and you have attendees or staff members who test positive, what are the next steps? First and foremost, you shouldn't allow them into the event. From an event perspective, you may also want to determine if you'll provide a virtual viewing option and how you'll handle any ticket fees they paid. For example, if this was a paid event, will they get reimbursed or not? If not, make sure you have that disclaimer in all of your communications.

☐ **Document proof of vaccine.** If you request attendees to bring proof they've been vaccinated, determine what documentation you want to see and how you'll make note of it. For example, do you want to see their vaccination card? Will you document this in a spreadsheet? Will you also ask them to sign something indicating their proof of vaccination is theirs and accurate?

☐ **Confirm on-site temperature checks.** If you ask every attendee and staff member to submit to a temperature check, confirm access to a touchless forehead or wrist thermometer.

☐ **Confirm PPE requirements.** If you ask attendees and staff members to use masks, make sure you have enough disposable masks for everyone.

☐ **Create a screening survey.** Symptom screening surveys have become part of the norm today. Below is a list of questions you should consider including on yours:

☐ Name

☐ Date

☐ Have you had close contact with someone who, in the past 14 days, tested positive for COVID-19?

☐ Within the last 10 days, have you tested positive for COVID-19?

☐ Have you had any one or more of these symptoms today or within the past 24 hours, which is new or not explained by a pre-existing condition?

    ☐ Fever of 100.4° or greater

    ☐ Chills

    ☐ Repeated shaking or shivering

    ☐ Cough

    ☐ Sore throat

    ☐ Shortness of breath

☐ Difficulty breathing

☐ Feeling unusually weak or fatigued

☐ Loss of taste or smell

☐ Muscle pain

☐ Headache

☐ Runny or congested nose

☐ Diarrhea

☐ Are you under quarantine or isolation orders?

☐ In the past 14 days, have you traveled internationally? If yes, where?

☐ My answers above are accurate to the best of my knowledge.

☐ I will notify [Company] if there are any changes to my answers during the event or if I test positive within 14 days after the event ends.

☐ **Identify any security checks.** If you are offering on-site testing or otherwise documenting your attendees' negative COVID-19 status, you may think about security checks in certain locations to avoid unregistered attendees stepping into your space. This may be more applicable for multi-day events at larger venues.

☐ **Confirm your on-site medical team.** If you choose to offer on-site testing, you may decide an on-site medical team is the best team to handle the execution of it. Ahead of your event date, confirm all details (including safety measures you want them to take once on-site) with the medical team.

☐ **Confirm your on-site compliance advisor.** Today, event professionals have the ability to become a Certified Pandemic Compliance Advisor. Whether or not you choose to have one on-site, you may decide to coordinate with an advisor to ensure your protocol will meet attendee expectations and general COVID-19 safety guidelines.

☐ **Identify multi-day event action items.** If you're hosting an event that spans multiple days, you will need to document what needs to be done at the end and beginning of each day. For example, what additional cleaning should be done? Where will you store event supplies so others don't come into contact with them? What actions from check-in will you repeat daily (e.g., taking temperatures)?

☐ **Document recommendations for off-hours.** For multi-day events, you'll also need to consider recommendations for off-hours activities for both staff members and attendees.

☐ **Ensure staff members and attendees know how to report violations.** As part of your communication efforts, make sure everyone knows the process for reporting any protocol violations. Ensure everyone on-site has the proper contact name and information for the person responsible for handling violations.

Communicating Your Safety Measures

At this point, your attendees are on-site at your event. They likely already understand what safety measures you're taking. But that doesn't mean it's time to stop communicating about them. Depending on what safety measures you're taking, now is the time to reiterate transparently about your attendees' role in ensuring their health and safety.

If, at any time, an attendee refuses to comply with your safety measures, refer to the previous section, Ensuring Attendee & Staff Safety.

On-Site Signage

Extending your event branding to on-site signage isn't anything new. But what may be: the need for new or additional signage dedicated to event safety and health.

Entrance Signage

We recommend placing event signage either before entering the event venue or immediately upon entrance. Your event venue may have their own signage indicating COVID-19 safety measures, and in that case, you may only need signage directing your attendees to your event.

Check-In Table Signage

The first place your attendees usually visit is the check-in or registration table. The check-in process could look different once in-person events resume, with fewer staff members managing check-in or touchless check-in enabled.

If you have a check-in table, we recommend communicating safety measures here.

If you're taking temperatures or requiring written screenings or on-site tests, this may be where your team carries out those actions. If it's not, direct your attendees to the location where they will handle this next step.

Additional Signage

There are a number of other places you can place safety-related signage on-site if you choose. These include, but are not limited to:

- At a medical tent, table, or room, indicating where attendees should go for certain actions (e.g., where to get tested versus where to take temperatures)

- On TV monitors to communicate messages and updates

- On tables or other facility equipment that should remain unused or untouched

- Throughout the venue to indicate traffic patterns (e.g., entrance and exit points)

Mobile App

If you're hosting a large or multi-day event, you may have access to an attendee mobile app. Leverage this tool to push messages and updates to your attendees throughout the event. For any critical communications, we recommend also sending an email to attendees, just in case you don't have 100% adoption of the mobile app.

Post-Event Safety Measures

You successfully (and safely) hosted an in-person event. It's time for a sigh of relief, knowing that your pre-event and on-site safety measures were implemented and well-received. Your worries are over, right? Not so fast. What happens in the weeks following your event is just as important as what happens pre-event and on-site.

Your post-event safety protocol is very much like your on-site safety protocol: It's your choice how to handle it. But everything you need to think about post-event can generally fall into these two questions:

Should We Provide End-of-Event Testing?

If you required your attendees to take a pre-event test (or provide proof of vaccination or negative test), you may also choose to provide end-of-event testing. If you contracted with an outside organization to handle the pre-event testing, they should also be able to handle your end-of-event testing. You may also provide self-administered test kits.

The downside to this: Most people should wait 72 hours after potential exposure to identify a positive test. So even if you take on the cost of testing at the end of your event, the results may or may not be accurate.

## What Happens if Attendees Test Positive?

If you get reports of people testing positive post-event (that is, they received a COVID-19 test after returning home), you'll need to both notify any exposed attendees directly, as well as the broader group.

The first step would be to ask the individual(s) who tested positive for a list of people who they were in close contact with (within six feet and for at least 15 minutes). As the event organizer, you should reach out to those individuals directly.

The next step would be to send an email to all attendees letting them know one or more attendees tested positive post-event. This email should also advise them to follow their local or federal guidelines should they exhibit any symptoms.

Although it can be difficult post-event to identify whether or not the virus was spread at your event, you still have a responsibility to ensure transparent communication.

Consultants
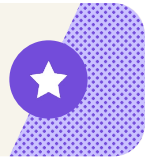
Martín Martinez Founder, A-Player Media

Martín is the Founder and President of A-Player Media, a creative live and virtual events company headquartered in Austin, Texas. A graduate of the University of Texas in Austin, Martín began his career as an early Austin employee at Facebook before moving to Google to launch marketing products for small-to-medium-sized businesses. A serial entrepreneur, he's founded and exited three companies, produced high-profile events across the state in several industries, and serves as an advisor to multiple conferences and festivals. He's intensely passionate about supporting early-stage entrepreneurs, creating memorable event experiences, working with creatives and performing artists, and all things SXSW.

Martín is also the Managing Director of the Founder Institute Texas, a global idea-stage accelerator program that spans over 200 cities in 65 countries globally. He oversees events, operations, partnerships, and graduate success across chapters across the Lone Star State. Since 2017, the FI Texas programs have launched over 80 Texas-based companies, with graduates collectively raising over $1M in pre-seed investment to date. Some FI graduates have moved to later-stage programs like Techstars, MassChallenge, the University of Texas Jon Brumley Venture Lab, DivInc, and more.

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Bryan Stacy Founder & CEO, Vaheala

Bryan is an entrepreneur who combines his HR strategy consulting and product management experiences to design digital health platforms that empower individuals to feel safe about their health. Following over a decade working with Accenture, Bryan pivoted to the health and wellness space after his experience with testicular cancer taught him the importance of health accountability.

He is currently the Founder and CEO of Vaheala, a COVID-19 testing and protocol tracking platform that helps organizations manage their coronavirus safety programs.

Vaheala partners with labs and test facilitators across the US to offer a flexible and comprehensive turnkey solution for organizations, event planners, and production studios to manage coronavirus safety. Vaheala has been described as "Turbo Tax for health safety" and considered the #1 platform for TV and movie productions.

In addition to Vaheala, Bryan consults with companies on culture development, most recently landing a company with which he consulted a place on Crain's Top 100 Places to Work. Bryan regularly speaks publicly on finding mission alignment between companies and employees, as well as how to align one's internal and external self to achieve maximum personal wellness.

Neha Prasad Founder & President, ANP Safety Consulting

Neha is the Founder and President of ANP (Analysis & Production) Safety Consulting, an industrial hygiene consulting firm. ANP Safety was originally created to help companies create and maintain all encompassing environmental, health, and safety programs.

In addition to being a Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH) and having earned her Master of Public Health, Neha has over 20 years of experience in manufacturing, industrial, biotech, universities, entertainment, production, transportation, research, and consulting fields. She is an advocate for safety in the workplace and achieving their environmental goals.

Neha specializes in demonstrating to businesses the economic and societal benefit of becoming a sustainable partner in their community. ANP Safety is now utilizing that expertise to help industries with their COVID-19 concerns and needs. They do this by teaming up with labs and developing the technology to help organizations navigate through the new normal by assisting with personal consultation, testing, tracking, and tracing.

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