



High Risk COVID Event Update

5 November 2020

The Department of Health has recently reviewed the COVID Event Plan approval process and the extent of and capacity for compliance with plans at **high risk COVID events** in WA. High risk events include those with:

- more than 4 hours duration;
- where alcohol is a primary or secondary focus;
- the event has a dance floor or mosh pit; and
- the venue's stage or performance area is a focal point, leading to very crowded spaces.

The review was undertaken to determine whether the introduction of COVID Event Plans and associated risk mitigation measures is resulting in events that occur in a COVID safe manner. This communique provides important information for event organisers on the review findings and resultant changes for managing high risk COVID events in the near future.

Review Outcome

The current risk-based approach to approving events in WA has allowed a range of event formats to proceed in an otherwise challenging COVID environment. COVID Event Plans that incorporate the necessary public health measures (e.g. good hygiene, rigorous cleaning regimes and physical distancing) reduce the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission, should a person(s) with COVID-19 infection attend an event while they are infectious with the virus.

While approved COVID Event Plans have been well implemented at many different types of events in WA, there have also been several instances where risk mitigation strategies required as part of approved COVID Event Plans have not been implemented at high-risk events. In particular, event formats that involve ready access to alcohol, high rates of intoxication and a focal point of interest where crowds congregate in close proximity (e.g. stages, mosh pits, etc) have been consistently problematic.

The review has determined that despite a comprehensive COVID Event Plan and the presence of COVID Safety Marshals, it has not been possible for events of this nature to occur in a COVID safe manner. Some of the areas of noncompliance noted so far include:

- COVID Safety Marshals unaware of their role and unfamiliar with the COVID Event Plan;
- COVID Safety Marshals unable and/or unwilling to engage with intoxicated patrons or those in heavily crowded areas (e.g. in front of the stage).
- Event layout results in individuals congregating in crowds where 2 sqm per person is not adhered to, particularly at events with a single point of focus;
- Intoxicated patrons do not adhere to physical distancing requirements;
- Insufficient food/drink service areas result in large queues and physical distancing is not maintained;
- Cleaners remain unaware of cleaning rates for high touch points (half hourly or hourly); and
- Insufficient cleaning staff available to meet COVID Event Plan requirements.

Event organisers are responsible for ensuring risk mitigation strategies in their COVID Event Plans are maintained throughout the event. Events that are not able to meet or comply with requirements of their approved COVID Event Plans are not permitted to occur whilst COVID-19 remains a risk to WA.

On the advice of the Chief Health Officer, COVID Event Plans **will not be approved** for event formats where risk mitigation strategies, including physical distancing, are not realistically achievable for the duration of the event. Whilst the WA Government and Department of Health remain committed to supporting the industry, public health remains the priority.

What is considered acceptable?

Each COVID Event Plan will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, events where patrons are likely to consume substantial quantities of alcohol prior to or during the event present a particular challenge in maintaining proposed risk mitigation strategies and are therefore unlikely to be approved.

Dividing patrons into sectioned areas, where alcohol remains readily available and/or crowds are still likely to congregate is unlikely to result in physical distancing and may create other crowd safety risks. This will not be considered as an effective risk mitigation measure.

The Department of Health encourages event organisers to consider alternative formats, including:

- seated, ticketed performances
- reduced patron numbers
- limited alcohol availability
- refusing entry to patrons arriving at the event intoxicated

Event organisers must ensure any proposed risk mitigation measures are realistically achievable for the duration of the event. If the measures are not deemed achievable, the COVID Event Plan will not be approved.

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