Meeting Professional’s COVID GUIDE 2022
The pandemic has been particularly painful for the meeting industry. As we approach 2022, every meeting professional hopes that things will get back to normal as soon as possible. However, is “back to normal” going to be possible? Or do we have to embrace that we must accept a “new normal” in the industry?

In the spring or summer of 2022, absent another serious variant, the COVID pandemic will diminish and most organizations will go back to holding meetings again. However, this is not a time to abandon COVID risk mitigation measures. This virus is not going away anytime soon. Further outbreaks and variants may continue to occur for the next couple of years as the virus spreads throughout the entire global population. And even if the virus magically disappeared today, the persistent fear of this virus will linger like a bad hangover on the meeting industry for quite some time.

A “new normal” is the best we can expect. And this “new normal” must address something most planners have never had to deal with in the past — “Health Security.” So what does an effective Health Security plan look like for the meeting industry? What will it take to demonstrate to your clients and your attendees that your COVID risk management plan is enough to protect the meeting’s business continuity and the attendees’ health?

An effective Health Security plan must include three foundational elements. The acronym for these three elements is PDR.

PREVENTION    DETECTION    MEDICAL RESPONSE
Below are six strategies guided by PDR that planners may want to consider when creating a Health Security plan for their upcoming meetings.

1. Sick Attendee Policy
2. Disinfection & Masks
3. Vaccine Verification
4. Wellness Program
5. Medical Care, COVID Testing & Surveys
6. Communication Strategy
1. Sick Attendee Policy

The most effective way to protect your meeting from exposure to COVID-19 is to keep ill attendees from coming to the meeting. How do you do this? Sit down with your client well before the program and encourage them to set a clear and effective sick attendee policy.

• Invite stakeholders in your client’s organization, including human resources, security, risk management and the even the C-suite

• Develop clear communications outlining the policy

• If you are sick, stay home

• If you get sick at the meeting, stay in your hotel room

• Coordinate quarantine procedures with the hotel

• Create a mechanism for monitoring and enforceability

• Offer convenient access to symptomatic rapid COVID Testing

2. Disinfection & Masks

• Frequent disinfection of surfaces is another tool to protect your attendees from COVID-19 infection.

• Schedule cleaning/disinfection of all meeting surfaces at least twice a day

• Shared attendee surfaces should be cleaned more frequently

• Hand sanitizer stations next to all meeting areas and meal locations

• Individual hand sanitizer placed in each registration packet

Though masks are a controversial subject, the data is clear: they do reduce the risk of COVID transmission. Therefore, we recommend attendees wear masks at programs in the near future. Though each organization has to make its own decision about this policy, keep in mind: if you remove a layer of protection from your risk management plan, you may want to add another layer somewhere else.
3. Vaccine Verification

The COVID vaccine is definitely the most powerful way to prevent the transmission of COVID infections at a meeting. The greater percentage of attendees vaccinated, the lower the risk of COVID impacting your program. Therefore, we recommend performing vaccine verification for your group before they arrive at the program. It is prudent to work with a 3rd party that utilizes a secure app allowing attendees to upload vaccine cards. Make sure that manual verification is performed and the data can be securely shared with your meeting software. Case uses for vaccine verification include:

- Securing a vaccine mandate at your meeting
- Differential testing strategy for vaccinated vs. non-vaccinated attendees
- Assisting in the measurement of COVID risk at your program

4. Wellness Program

Every human is exposed to hundreds of viruses a day. Our most powerful defense from these infectious agents, and the reason we don't get sick more often, is our magical immune system. So what can planners do to strengthen attendees' immune systems? It turns out that your lifestyle choices can affect how well your immune system can protect you from viruses. Create a wellness program for your meetings. We encourage you to include components that support the following:

- Sleep
- Healthy nutrition
- Stress management

The “new normal” elevates wellness programs at the meeting to more than a “feel-good” offering. It can actually reduce the risk of your attendees coming down with a flu-like illness such as COVID-19.
5. Medical Care, COVID Testing & Surveys

Two of the three elements of an effective Health Security plan are “Detection” and “Response.”

**DETECTION** of the virus can be accomplished by:

A. Performing daily health surveys on your attendees starting a couple of days before the meeting and continuing until the end of the meeting. Is it foolproof? Absolutely not, however, it offers another layer of protection by detecting attendees who may have COVID symptoms.

B. Providing convenient access to rapid COVID tests for symptomatic attendees. Testing for COVID has advanced considerably since March 2020. A planner can literally hand out a self-administered, highly sensitive, rapid COVID test to a symptomatic attendee. The attendee can then perform the test in their hotel room with results in 30 minutes. *At InHouse Physicians, we offer planners an app that can educate attendees on how to use the test, upload results, perform result verification, and securely share the results with the planner after receiving attendee consent.*

C. Surveillance Testing is a third approach to detection. With this strategy, planners have two options.

   i. Ship attendees a COVID test to self-administer at home. This test is to be performed by the attendee a day before the program.

   ii. Deliver on-site testing when attendees arrive at the venue.

The goal of this type of testing is to identify asymptomatic attendees before they enter the meeting.

**RESPONSE** is satisfied by providing your attendees who are COVID-suspicious or COVID-confirmed with access to convenient, high quality medical care. This satisfies your Duty of Care when it comes to protecting the well-being of an attendee with COVID. What are the options planners have at their disposal?

A. **On-Site Medical Care** - This can be delivered by vendors such as InHouse Physicians in a cost-effective and scalable manner that meets the needs of your group.

B. **Local Urgent Care** - Planners can build a relationship with an urgent care close to the meeting venue. We would encourage NOT relying on emergency rooms, which are expensive, full of patients with infectious diseases, and very inconvenient.

C. **Telemedicine** - This can be a practical way to address attendee health issues and is another service that InHouse Physicians provides to its clients.
6. Communication Strategy

Clear communication needs to be established with attendees and other meeting stakeholders. This communication should focus on the three elements of *Health Security: Prevention, Detection and Medical Response.*

A. Outline the communication channels available to reach attendees—such as email, intranet postings, fliers, posters, videos, blog posts, FAQs—and have a “source of truth” resource where employees can go to for the latest updates (this could be a company intranet site or a physical location such as a bulletin board).

B. Partner with legal, human resources (HR) and other key leadership for timely review and approval of all messaging and materials prior to distribution.

C. Designate a point person to stay on top of developments, manage the communication process, and receive and respond to attendee concerns.
   
   i. Establish a line of communication for attendees to submit questions related to COVID prevention and preparedness. Post answers to questions that may be of general interest.

   ii. Establish “go-to resources” to help distribute key messages and answer attendee questions or concerns.

D. Carefully consider your messaging. State the facts, outline the impact, and share Health Security measures being taken. Specifically:

   i. Provide ongoing assurance that the organization is safeguarding attendee health in a manner that is appropriately respectful of everyone’s privacy.

   ii. Review communications for content and tone — don’t trivialize or escalate attendee concerns, and be sure to collect / respond to feedback.

   iii. Place links to official news sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on select communications.

   iv. Provide FAQs, talking points and other information to arm “go-to resources” with facts and information for your attendees.

   v. Redirect more complex questions to your client’s HR team.
In summary, the meeting industry does not have the luxury of sitting back and waiting for things to return to normal. The “new normal” necessitates taking proactive measures to reassure organizations that it is safe and responsible to have meetings again. The concept of *Health Security* has traditionally been one associated with public health. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting industry must prioritize *Health Security* as an achievable goal for every meeting and event.

**NEED HELP WITH HEALTH SECURITY?**

Contact our experts to talk about your unique needs.

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*InHousePhysicians.com*

For 30 years, national and global organizations have trusted InHouse Physicians to ensure health security at meetings and events. We also manage onsite employee health and wellness programs while providing best in class data security. It’s complete onsite medical support. With the planning, communication and reporting that makes your life easier—and everyone’s lives safer.*