

# BRINGING EVENTS BACK

## AUSTIN-TRAVIS COUNTY COVID-19 SAFETY GUIDE FOR VENUES & SPECIAL EVENTS





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## **PURPOSE**

Bringing Events Back: Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Safety Guide for Venues and Special Events outlines both COVID-19 health and safety recommendations and the new requirements for event and venue organizers in Austin and Travis County. Local venues, live music and events are paramount to Austin's culture and economy. Austin-Travis County stands with the special events industry to support reopening when it is safe to do so.

The overwhelming majority of events and venues in Austin-Travis County are locally operated and have an immediate benefit to the Austin economy, community, and culture. In the wake of COVID-19 and the unprecedented impacts to the experience sector, the City's event partners, and the general industry need more information to plan for safely resuming their business operations. The industry has requested clear reopening guidelines from Austin-Travis County so that they may plan for reopening venues and holding events safely.

To ensure sustainability post-pandemic, we must consider both the public and economic health of Austin. Austin is a premiere destination for meetings and conventions, live music and special events. The local meetings and convention industry generated \$587 million in direct spending to our economy in 2019. Each year, close to 1.3 million people visit Austin's parks for festivals, outdoor weddings and other events. In 2019, SXSW alone generated an estimated \$355.9 million in economic impact.

## **REGULAR UPDATES TO GUIDANCE & COMPLIANCE**

Bringing Events Back: Austin-Travis County Safety Guide for Venues and Special Events is a starting point for resuming events and reopening venues as our community, residents and businesses slowly recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Special events permitted by Austin Center for Events on public property have not been allowed since March 2020 and many venues have been shuttered for months.

These guidelines will be reviewed and updated as health conditions change based on the guidance of Austin Public Health officials and the Texas Department of Health and Safety (DSHS) along with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the City of Austin and Travis County government and in compliance with state and federal mandates. These guidelines are congruent with State of Texas (Open Texas) reopening health protocol standards. This local guidance is designed to help all venues and special events work from the same standards to ensure Austin-Travis County venues and events maximize safety protocols and help to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Please check [austintexas.gov/eventreopeningguide](https://austintexas.gov/eventreopeningguide) for updates. More information can be found at [austintexas.gov/ace](https://austintexas.gov/ace). For specific questions, please contact us at [specialevents@austintexas.gov](mailto:specialevents@austintexas.gov)

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

The photos in this guide are from pre-COVID-19 events. We look forward to the time when these guidelines are no longer needed, and events can be held as they once were. Special thanks to Cody Cowan and Lisa Hause Photography for use of images.



# BRINGING EVENTS BACK

AUSTIN-TRAVIS COUNTY COVID-19 SAFETY GUIDE FOR VENUES & SPECIAL EVENTS

Photo credit: Cody Cowan

## 1. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR ALL VENUES & EVENTS IN AUSTIN-TRAVIS COUNTY

As we look to reopening, we recommended that all events and venues consider the following COVID-19 safety procedures to mitigate risks and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### Isolation Room or Area

All venues and events should consider having at least one designated isolation room or area. An isolation room or area gives the venue the ability to quickly isolate and remove a person who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms during an event. This space should be back of house when possible and easy to sanitize and disinfect. We recommend designating isolation rooms or areas near venue exits to provide medical personnel access to individuals who need medical attention or ambulance transport.

### Case Notification

All venues and event producers must develop case notification plans to comply with Austin Public Health requirements for contract tracing. Venues, event organizers and individual participants should report positive cases to APH. Please visit [aph.preparedness@austintexas.gov](mailto:aph.preparedness@austintexas.gov).



## Safety Coordinator

A Safety Coordinator is recommended for all indoor venues and required for outdoor events permitted by Austin Center for Events. The purpose of a Safety Coordinator is to ensure compliance and oversee enforcement of the venue's COVID-19 health and safety plan. The Safety Coordinator should be trained in COVID-19 safety protocols and able to ensure the elements of the health and safety plan are upheld during the event.



Photo credit: Lisa Hause Photography

## 2. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR INDOOR VENUES

An indoor venue is defined as a brick-and-mortar business with permanent operational capacity limits designated by the City or County Fire Department.

### 2a. Social Distancing

Venues and their clients should work together to ensure social distancing measures are followed by ensuring that no less than six feet remains between individuals.

#### Ways to successfully accomplish social distancing:

1. Post enhanced, visible signage throughout the event space and foyers to remind individuals to maintain six-foot distance.
2. Plan queue lines in advance, supply adequate staffing and post signage to encourage people in line to always keep six feet of distance.
3. Plan to designate separate entrance and exit doors in and out of the event space when and if possible.
4. Divide hallways with visible signage (floor decals, stanchions, wall signage) to designate single-direction lanes.
5. Designate single-direction lanes on trade show floors to help attendees navigate and maintain social distance.
6. Design floor plans and place equipment to support social distancing and reduce seats within all theater, round tables and classroom style seating set ups.
7. Plan staffing levels that align with the venue's total number of entry and exit points to balance the flow of people entering, and exiting events spaces and restrooms. Consider using crowd management clickers.
8. External and internal doors should be propped open or staffed and held open when possible to reduce recurrence of cross-touching of doors. Open external doors only when there will not be unreasonable sound impacts to neighbors and right of way.

9. Conferences and keynote sessions should pre-arrange an orchestrated exit by row or section to reduce the volume of people at exits and gathering in the lobby at once.
10. When applicable, appropriate signage should be displayed outside and within the elevator to properly message expectations to attendees, clients, and staff to include that face coverings should always be worn in elevators.

## 2b. Enhanced Cleaning and Sanitization

All venues should use products and cleaning procedures that meet or exceed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), CDC and EPA guidelines, which include use of EPA List N products.

### Ways to successfully ensure enhanced cleaning and sanitization:

1. **Enhanced Cleaning and Sanitization Measures:** A visible and enhanced cleaning staffing level proportional to minimum cleaning requirements should be dispersed throughout all shared, communal areas. Staff should be designated and assigned to disinfect high touch areas on a routine basis including but not limited to elevator buttons, hand railings, door railings, tables, and restrooms multiple times throughout the day while maintaining six feet of distance from all individuals in the venue.
2. **Planning and Communication:** The venue should plan for extended break times between sessions in support of elevated cleaning protocols. The client will need to plan for staggered session ending times in support of social distancing while attendees exit sessions. Client should utilize their website, event app, social media, etc. to push out attendees' code of conduct and COVID-19 health and safety expectations prior to their arrival.
3. **Hand Washing Stations:** A proportionate number of sinks and hand washing stations should be readily available throughout venue.
4. **Hand Sanitizer:** Hand sanitizing stations should be visible throughout the building and in session rooms.
5. **Face Coverings:** the business establishment may require attendees to always wear face coverings within the venue.
6. **HVAC:** every venue should ensure their HVAC system complies with all CDC recommendations.
7. **Signage and Communication:** Ample signage should be posted throughout the venue reminding individuals to practice social distancing, to properly wear their face coverings, practice frequent handwashing, cover cough/sneeze and to avoid touching their face. Examples of enhanced venue signage and messaging include but are not limited to:



- a. Floor Clings are excellent for demonstrating correct direction to walk or appropriate distance to keep from others.
- b. Mirror Clings with hand washing and social distancing reminders.
- c. Digital Signs throughout venue with helpful hygiene and distancing reminders.
- d. Code of Conduct Signs at entry to parking, building and event itself. Sample text: "By entering this event you agree to comply with all social distancing and hygiene requirements and that within the past 14 days you have had no symptoms or to your best knowledge come in contact with anyone who is currently infected with COVID-19."



### 3. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR OUTDOOR EVENTS

The existing special event permit requirements and application process should be followed as part of Chapter 4-20 of the Special Events Ordinance. The same COVID-19 health and safety guidance for indoor venues applies to all outdoor events. Outdoor event applicants should submit the existing Austin Center for Events special event application and a new electronic COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan to comply with the new permitting requirement.

#### 3a. New Permit Requirements: COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan

A COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan is a new requirement for events permitted by Austin Center for Events. The COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan must be included with the special event permit application. [A new standardized form](#) will guide applicants through completion of the plan requirements.

#### COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan Components

In the COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan, event organizers are required to demonstrate how the event will comply with or exceed current COVID-19 related City of Austin and Travis County Orders and in compliance with Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) protocols.

[The COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan Form](#) allows applicants to detail their plans for before, during and after an event for the following categories:

1. **Safety Coordination & Self-Enforcement Procedure:** The event organizer should designate single point of contact on-site throughout the event who serves as a Safety Coordinator and is responsible for implementation of this plan. The Safety Coordinator can be an existing staff member or event organizer.
2. **Health Screening, Isolation & Case Reporting Procedures:** The event organizer must detail a procedure for health screening, such as temperature checks, isolation room or areas, and their plan for reporting positive cases to Austin Public Health. Event and venue organizers and individual participants should notify APH of positive cases at [aph.preparedness@austintexas.gov](mailto:aph.preparedness@austintexas.gov).
3. **Social Distancing Procedure:** The event organizer must detail a procedure for how social distancing



Photo credit: Lisa Hause Photography



Photo credit: Lisa Hause Photography

will be maintained during the event, including ingress and egress.

4. **Enhanced Cleaning & Sanitization Procedure:** The event organizer must detail a procedure for how they will manage enhanced cleaning and safety requirements for staff and patrons.
5. **Personal Protection Equipment Procedure:** The event organizer must detail a procedure for staff and patrons personal protective equipment including who is responsible for supplying PPE.
6. **Food & Beverage Service Safety Procedure:** The event organizer must detail a procedure for how food and beverage service will be managed including COVID-19 safety and sanitization requirements.

### **3b. Minimum Requirements for Safety & Sanitization for Outdoor Events**

The following guidance is to support health and safety for outdoor events, including for when there are no built-in facilities. Outdoor events should use products and measures which meet or exceed the CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines.

Minimum requirements for successful health and safety plans for outdoor events:

1. **Minimum number of portable toilets:** 1 toilet per 50 attendees (based on maximum point-in-time attendance). A minimum of one handicap-equipped toilet facility must be provided, with at least one additional handicap-equipped toilet for every 10 regular toilets required.
2. **Minimum number of portable toilets for drive-in events:** 1 per 15 vehicles. A minimum of one handicap-equipped toilet facility must be provided, with at least one additional handicap-equipped toilet for every 10 regular toilets required.
3. **Minimum number of hand washing stations** is based on the number of toilets provided. The requirement is 1 handwashing station per 6 toilets.
4. **Minimum number of hand sanitizer stations** based on assembly size for all events. 1 hand sanitizing station required for every 2 toilets.



5. Minimum frequency recommendation for sanitizing commonly touched surfaces. A minimum of once per hour using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA-N) recommended cleaners and sanitizers.
6. Required to communicate to staff and attendees about precautionary measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Communication can include on-site signage, web postings and ticket notations.
7. Take all feasible measures to screen attendees for COVID-19 symptoms before entering the event.
8. Establish a process to treat and isolate attendees who become sick or show COVID-19 related symptoms during the event.

## 4. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR ALL EMPLOYEES & VENDORS

### 4a. Responsibility of Venues for Staff and Vendors

Venue owners and event organizers are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of employees and event vendors. Both staff members and vendors play a key role in mitigating risk and ensuring a safe and successful event.

#### Ways to successfully accomplish health and safety for all staff and vendors:

1. Self-Reporting of Illness - All workers should self-report to management, and/or the designated Safety Coordinator, if they are experiencing illness or any potential symptoms of COVID-19. Management should immediately send the worker home and require them to stay at home, receive a COVID-19 test, or when applicable a diagnosis and treatment before demonstrating their ability to return to work. (See 4b)
2. Screening: All workers should be screened outside of the venue prior to being allowed entry.
3. Social Distancing - Workers must maintain at least six feet of separation from other individuals. If such distancing is not feasible, measures such as face covering, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitization should be rigorously practiced.
4. Hygiene: Workers should practice frequent hand washing and/or hand sanitization as a front-line defense to reduce the spread of the virus.
5. Cleanliness: All back of house restrooms, corridors, freight elevators, break rooms, and frequent touch points should be sanitized frequently throughout the day.
6. Face Coverings: Workers should wear face coverings over the nose and mouth. Face coverings may be required by the business establishment for all employees while on property.
7. Training: All employees should be adequately trained prior to re-opening on topics including but not limited to proper usage of personal protective equipment, elevated hygiene efforts, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and COVID-19 specific protocols and safety.
8. Signage: Signage should be displayed throughout back of house and break room areas to remind all employees about social distancing, hygiene, cleanliness, and face coverings.
9. Pre-Shift Meetings and Breaks: Shift meetings should be conducted in areas that accommodate social distancing guidelines. Arrival of staff and scheduled lunches and breaks should be staggered to reduce all back of the house, employee traffic.



## 4b. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR GENERAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

### (AUDIO VISUAL, RENTAL PRODUCT PROVIDERS AND ALL EVENT VENDORS)

All vendors providing any service, delivery or function to an event should comply with all the same requirements for employees and vendors along with these added requirements:

1. All equipment, décor, cables, crates, etc. should be cleaned and sanitized prior to entering the venue.
2. Technician workspaces should be no less than 6' apart, side to side and front to back.
3. All shared equipment or physical elements on stage should be cleaned and sanitized before and between each use.

## 4c. Employee Return to Work Policy

Do not allow a worker with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure (with an exception granted for healthcare workers and critical infrastructure workers).

Send home any worker who has any new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19 per DSHS and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which are

- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19.

In the case of a worker who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications).
- And the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).
- And at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

In the case of a worker who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and has not been evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, the individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and they may not return to work until they have completed the same three-step criteria listed above.

If a worker has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period, the individual must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis.







Photo credit: Lisa Hause Photography

## 5. SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR FOOD & BEVERAGE SERVICE PROVIDERS

All food and beverage service providers including but not limited to in house dining, caterers, and food trucks servicing an event must be properly permitted and ensure they are following the minimum recommended health protocols and checklists from the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).

The Environmental Health Services Division (EHSD) of Austin Public Health ensures food safety at all events and may also issue compliance orders. The following guidance is required.

### 5a. Social Distancing for Food and Beverage Service

1. A group of ten or fewer individuals must be at least six feet from another group of ten or fewer individuals except when the groups are seated at tables that are at least four feet apart and separated by a solid barrier.
2. Groups must always maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other groups, including while waiting to be seated. The 6 feet of distance between groups seated at different tables is not required if engineering controls, such as a partition, are used between the tables.
3. A booth may be next to another booth if a partition is constructed between the booths, and that partition is at least 6 feet tall above ground level.
4. Tables should generally be at least 6 feet apart from any part of another table. However, a food and beverage area may have tables at least 4 feet apart from any part of another table, provided a partition is used between the tables that is at least 6 feet tall and 6 feet wide.
5. Make hand sanitizing stations available upon entry to the food and beverage areas.



Photo credit: Lisa Hause Photography

## 5b. Sanitization Requirements for Food and Beverage Service

1. Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as handles, knobs, tables, and chairs.
2. Regularly and frequently clean restrooms and portable toilets.
3. Disinfect any items that come in to contact with customers.
4. Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available to workers and customers.
5. Place readily visible signage at the food and beverage area to remind everyone of best hygiene practices.

## 5c. Food Packaging & Service for Food and Beverage Service

1. Bulk food items must be pre-packaged for vending.
2. Do not leave condiments, silverware, flatware, glassware, or other traditional tabletop items on an unoccupied table or countertop.
3. Provide condiments only upon request, and in single use (non-reusable) portions.
4. Use disposable menus (new for each patron).
5. If a buffet is offered, food and beverage area workers must serve the food to customers.
6. Contactless payment is encouraged. Where not available, contact should be minimized. Both parties should wash or sanitize hands after the payment process.



## 6. CONTRIBUTORS & SUPPORT

To provide the special event industry with information to plan for reopening, these guidelines were thoughtfully developed by an interdepartmental team at the City of Austin and Travis County Special Events. Contributors consist of the agencies who make up the Austin Center for Events which include special event representatives from Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services, Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department, Austin Resource Recovery, Development Services Department, Austin Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Transportation Department, Communications and Public Information Office, Austin Code Department and Austin Public Health. Contributions for indoor guidance were developed by the Austin Convention Center Department. Contributors also include Travis County Fire Marshall's Office and Austin Public Library Department, Economic Development Music Office, Visit Austin, and Austin Law Department.

The Austin Convention Center developed guidance for indoor events and meetings. Input was gathered and applied from the Experience Sector COVID-19 Economic Recovery Working Group and a group of over 40 Austin event and venue industry leaders. These guidelines were also reviewed by Reopening Every Venue Safely (REVS) a 10-city pilot of Music Cities Together for input by the industry across multiple jurisdictions. Thank you to each business and industry leader who aided in the creation of these guidelines.

**Visit [austintexas.gov/ace](https://austintexas.gov/ace). For specific questions,  
Please contact us at [specialevents@austintexas.gov](mailto:specialevents@austintexas.gov)**

