



**COVID-19 Safety Standards for  
Commencement and Graduation Ceremonies  
Held by Colleges and Universities, K-12 Public and Private Schools**

**Effective as of March 22, 2021  
Updated April 28, 2021**

**Purpose**

These COVID-19 Safety Standards are issued to establish minimum standards for commencement and graduation ceremonies (“Commencements”) held by colleges, universities, or K-12 public and private schools.

These safety standards are minimum requirements only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The public health data for disease prevention that inform these guidelines can and does change frequently, and the organizer and venue operator for each Commencement ceremony is responsible for adhering to all local, state and federal requirements. Commencement organizers and venue operators are also responsible for staying abreast of any updates to these requirements.

**Standards for Responsible Commencements in Massachusetts**

No Commencement shall occur in spring or summer 2021 without meeting these COVID-19 safety standards.

Commencements may be held indoors or outdoors, in event spaces, ballrooms, private clubs and party rooms, public places, and stadiums, arenas, and ball parks.

All commencements must follow the safety standards below.

The following Commencement Safety Standards are organized around four distinct categories covering Capacity Limits and Operations, Social Distancing, Hygiene Protocols, and Cleaning and Disinfecting.

**I. Capacity Limits and Operations**

- Commencements must follow the capacity limits for the venue at which the commencement is held:
  - Commencements at indoor theaters (including movie theaters), concert halls, and other performance venues must follow the sector guidance for [Theaters and Performance Venues](#).
  - Commencements at indoor event spaces, ballrooms, private clubs and party rooms, and public spaces must follow the sector guidance for [Indoor and Outdoor Events](#).
  - Commencements at indoor stadiums, arenas, and other Large Capacity Event Venues must follow the capacity limits established for Large Capacity Event Venues and the safety standards established by the venue and submitted to the Department of Public Health (DPH).
  
- Commencements held **outdoors** and not in one of the facilities listed above are not subject to a capacity limit but must adhere to the social distancing requirements specified below.

- Commencements must be held in a space that can accommodate required social distancing and the flow of air.
  - Distancing:
    - If graduating students are outdoors and masked, they may be seated 3 feet apart.
    - If graduating students are indoors and masked, they must be seated 6 feet apart.
    - Whether indoors or outdoors, all other attendees must be seated 6 feet apart and wear masks, except for members of the same household/group.
  - Tents are only permitted if at least 50 percent of the perimeter is open.
  - Ceremonies should be kept as brief as possible.
  - No food or drink permitted.
  - No communal gathering or reception either before or after the Commencement.
  
- Attendance must be limited to faculty, administrators, speakers, and graduates and their guests only.
  - Guests are limited to no more than 6 guests per graduate
  - Guests must register in advance of the Commencement, and only those who have registered may attend.
  - Staff must confirm that all guests entering the Commencement have complied with registration and ticketing requirements.
  
- Registration/ticketing helps ensure that guests and graduates have been screened for COVID-19 symptoms.
  - Contactless registration/ticketing is encouraged.
  - Graduates and guests, as well as faculty, administrators, and speakers, must attest at the time of registration/ticketing that they will not attend the Commencement if:
    - They are experiencing any symptoms such as fever (100.0° and above) or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle/body aches, runny nose/congestion, new loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
    - They have had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 and have not completed the required quarantine period. “Close contact” means living in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g., sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.
    - They are currently required to self-isolate or quarantine by their doctor or a local public health official.
  
- Graduates and guests, including faculty, administrators, and speakers, will be required to disclose to the college, university, or school if they test positive for COVID-19 after the Commencement for purposes of cleaning/disinfecting and contact tracing.
  - If the college, university, or school is notified of any positive case following the Commencement, the school must immediately notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the school is located and where the Commencement occurred (if different) and the facility at which the Commencement took place. Schools must assist the LBOH with contact tracing efforts, including advising likely contacts to isolate and self-quarantine. Testing of other guests or graduates may be recommended consistent with guidance and/or at the request of the LBOH.

- Staff or attendants must monitor entries and exits and limit occupancy at all times to ensure that:
  - All Commencements must have staggered timed entry and exit for all participants and attendees in order to avoid crowding before or after a ceremony.
  - On the dais/platform, faculty and distinguished guests are seated or standing at least 6 feet apart from each other.
  - Graduates are seated or standing with appropriate distancing:
    - If outdoors and masked, at least 3 feet apart from each other
    - If indoors and masked, at least 6 feet apart from each other
  - Guests who are not part of the same household/group must be seated at least 6 feet apart from other guests.
  - Guests who are members of the same household/group are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.
  
- Graduates may be invited to walk across the stage individually and turn their tassel in lieu of receiving the diploma.
  - Alternatively, diplomas and awards may also be distributed if bestowing the awards and diplomas is done cautiously (e.g., placing each diploma and award on a table as the graduate walks by to retrieve it).
  
- If multiple Commencements are occurring in the same location, stagger event times to avoid congregation of guests and graduates in different groups and to allow for thorough cleaning of the space between events, including seating areas.

## **II. Social Distancing**

- Require face coverings for all workers, guests, and graduates, except where unsafe due to medical condition or disability.
  - Guests must wear their face coverings at all times.
  - Graduates must wear their face coverings at all times, except for designated photograph locations.
  - Commencement speakers may remove their face coverings during their remarks only, provided that there is at least 6 feet between the speaker and the audience.
  
- Ensure appropriate distancing between individuals or households/groups where possible:
  - Install physical barriers for check-in stations where possible, otherwise maintain 6 feet of distance where not possible.
  - Post clearly visible signage regarding the need to maintain 6 feet of social distancing.
  - Put markers outside the Commencement area to ensure distance for guests and graduates who are waiting to enter. All guests must maintain 6 feet of distance, unless they are part of the same household/group. If graduates are outdoors and masked, they may maintain 3 feet of distance. If they are indoors and masked, they must maintain 6 feet of distance.
  - Establish directional pathways to manage flow for foot traffic, to minimize contact (e.g., one-way entrance and exit, one-way pathways). Post clearly visible signage regarding these policies.
  
- Reconfigure seating areas to ensure 6 feet of distance between guests not in the same household/group.
  - Distance shall be measured from the closest boundary of one guest seating area to the closest boundary of another guest seating area.

- This may require blocking every other row of seats and staggered seating within rows.
  - Remind guests to always remain in their designated seating location during the Commencement.
  - Workers should facilitate organized entrance and exit from the seating areas to prevent unnecessary congregation of guests and graduates, such as successive, row-by-row exiting.
- Singing and the playing of brass and wind instruments is discouraged. Singing is not allowed indoors. For Commencements involving outdoor singing or the indoor or outdoor playing of brass or wind instruments, special distancing must be followed:
    - At least 10 feet between performers
    - At least 25 feet between performers and the first row of the audience
    - Plexiglass barriers cannot be used to reduce required distance between performers or between performers and the audience.
  - Encourage the use of electronic Commencement programs where possible. All commonly touched physical materials must be discarded or sanitized between use.

### **III. Hygiene Protocols**

- Disinfect shared equipment, including microphones and podiums, before use by another worker or graduate. Prohibit any mutual touching of equipment without sanitation between uses.
- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water wherever possible, and encourage frequent handwashing; alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent alcohol may be used as an alternative.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent alcohol shall be made available at entrances, exits, and throughout the Commencement area for workers, guests, and graduates.
- Post visible signage throughout the site to remind workers, guests, and graduates of hygiene and safety protocols.

### **IV. Cleaning and Disinfecting**

- Conduct frequent cleaning and disinfection of site.
- Keep cleaning logs that include date, time, and scope of cleaning.
- Conduct frequent disinfecting of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., microphones, doorknobs, bathrooms, seats, and ticket counters).
- Disinfect seating areas and any other mutually-touched objects immediately after each use. At no point should guests or graduates come in contact with objects that others have touched without those objects first being disinfected according to CDC guidelines.