



GUIDELINES FOR ORGANIZING EVENTS RESPONSIBLY

**Good practices for organizing a safe event
to prevent the spread of COVID-19**



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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines were compiled by the Estonian Convention Bureau as a resource for event organizers and venues on how to organize safe and infection-free events such as conferences, meetings and seminars. We have mapped out the main health and safety measures, activities and guidelines that the event organizer, together with the venue and other partners, should pay attention to. The guidelines are suitable for both local and international events. The guidelines are based on recommendations and requirements established by the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Estonian Health Board and also draw on best international practices. Use these guidelines as a basis for establishing your own health and safety rules and reminders for visitors.

In addition to the guidelines below, event organizers must abide by the restrictions on the organization of events (maximum number of participants, distancing, etc.) established by the Estonian Government and Health Board.

- **Current Covid-19 regulations for events in Estonia can be found at the Estonian Convention Bureau's web site <https://www.ecb.ee/covid-19-information-for-events-in-estonia/>**
- **The full versions of the legal acts issued by the Government of the Republic are available at riigiteataja.ee and kriis.ee. All important general guidelines (cleaning, catering, action to be taken in the case of illness in the workplace, etc.) can be found on the Health Board's website: www.terviseamet.ee/et/COVID-19-trukised**

We recommend choosing event venues and event partners from among companies who have pledged to ensure COVID-19 safety. Many of these companies can be identified by the consumer label "Siin on turvaline" (Safe Here). Companies that are awarded the label have taken a public responsibility to fully comply with the requirements in force in the Republic of Estonia to prevent the spread of COVID-19, in order to ensure the safety of both staff and visitors. More information: <https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/puhka-eestis/otsi-eestis-reisides-silti-siin-on-turvaline>

If you have any questions, contact the local government unit, the Health Board or the Estonian Convention Bureau.

MASKS ARE MANDATORY AT EVENTS

Protective facemasks are required by law in public indoor spaces in Estonia. This obligation does not apply to children under the age of 12 or if the wearing of a mask is not possible for health reasons, or due to special needs, the nature of the work or activity, or other overriding reasons.

If there is no mask mandate in place at a given time, the event organizer or venue may still require that masks be worn during the event in the interests of the safety of all visitors.

Let your attendees know in advance whether masks will be mandatory at the event.

The organizer can either distribute masks, tell participants to bring masks with them, or offer the opportunity to purchase a mask on the spot. Reusable (including personalized, branded) masks can also be used.

Think ahead about how to hand out masks safely, without contact, and where and how participants can dispose of used masks.

Also plan how mask wearing will be enforced – whether this will be done by event security, volunteers or members of the organizing team.

THE EVENT VENUE

Choose a venue that has been awarded a "Safe Here" consumer label or follows COVID-19 health and safety rules (referred to as a "Safety Protocol"), and you can verify compliance.

Distancing

When setting the maximum number of participants, abide by the government restrictions in force on event attendance and group size. Remember that the limits can change at short notice, so come up with contingency plans (have a plan in place for switching to a hybrid event or fully virtual event in case a conventional event cannot be held). This will allow you to change gear smoothly if needed.

When organizing events, make sure that it will be possible for the participants, speakers and organizing team to follow the distancing rules. Make the services (catering, information point, coat check, etc.) in the event area as dispersed as possible to minimize close contact.

Larger-than-normal conference venues or hybrid solutions can be used to make it easier to disperse participants – for example, divide participants between different rooms, use the possibility of video bridges between different physical rooms.

Use a much more dispersed layout, create wider aisles, and use tape to indicate trajectories and service points.

Reduce parallel sessions taking place in different rooms to avoid movement of participants between the rooms. Think carefully about the logistics of the event.

Conference sessions and catering should not take place in the same room.

Assign specific numbered or personalized seating to participants so that participants can be identified later if any of them fall ill.

Think about the "customer journey" and map out possible bottlenecks (coat check, toilet, catering, registration) and think of solutions to avoid them (e.g. allot more time for coffee breaks, etc.). In order to reduce the infection risk, make sure that participants enter and exit the building in a dispersed manner, and that they are also spread out while in the building, such as in the auditorium, catering and lounge areas, cloakrooms and rest rooms.

Make use of signage, floor markings, and post and rope barriers to direct visitors to where they need to go.

Make sure that guests can easily and without queuing find all the places they need (cloakroom, information kits, event rooms, elevators/lifts, dining areas, rest rooms, etc.) using clear signs and labels to prevent visitors from having to wander around.

Recommend the use of stairs instead of elevators and, if possible, separate hallways and stairs into one-way-only lanes.

If possible, use different doors for entrances and exits.

If there are exhibition areas, place exhibitor booths as far apart as possible to avoid excessive concentration of visitors.

If possible, conduct some sessions outdoors (opening and closing, catering, etc.).

Set aside a separate room where anyone who has symptoms can be isolated, if necessary.

Minimizing the need for physical contact

Make access control as contactless as possible, without queuing, allowing people to maintain a safe distance. If possible, use digital solutions or install Plexiglas barriers at the registration desk/ticket office.

Avoid passing out information in hard copy or handing out promotional freebies (instead, upload schedules and presentations to the internet, use existing digital event apps or develop your own mobile app for the event, use electronic displays or closed-circuit radio, place materials on the chairs in the main auditorium beforehand)

Distribution of event passes, lanyards and facemasks should be contactless.

If you need signatures from participants, make sure they are collected in a safe way.

Minimize the use of cash.

Instead of passing a microphone from one person to another, have the participants use apps to ask questions (this also gives an equal opportunity to participate in the discussion on virtual channels).

If you plan to provide a cloakroom service, think through how this will work, whether it will be staffed or self-service. If possible, plan for 50% more hooks/pegs so that the clothes are farther apart. The organizer must ensure that the cloakroom has hand sanitizer and that no queues form. The cloakroom attendant must wear protective gloves and mask and wash or disinfect their hands regularly. If possible, use single-use-only cloakroom numbers.

Security staff

The event organizer should plan on having enough security and event staff present to ensure that they can enforce the requirements in the guidelines given the nature of the event and the number of visitors.

The organizer of the event should also make sure that the security and event staff know the correct use of the basic protective equipment (glasses, masks, gloves).

Disinfectants and sanitizer

The venue and the event organizer must ensure that disinfectants are available and that the participants follow the requirements for use of hand sanitizer.

The frequency of use of disinfectants is directly related to their availability on different trajectories. Sanitizer dispensers should be set up at entrances as well as by stairs, elevators, and anywhere food is served.

All equipment in common use – whether it is a microphone, a shared computer, or a digital projector remote control – must be disinfected each time it is used. Plan on having twice as many items such as microphones and projector remote controls to avoid cross-use.

Cleaning of rooms and surfaces

Indoor areas must be cleaned daily before and after an event or other gathering; and in case of longer events, also after breaks.

Time for cleaning, disinfection and ventilation between events held in the same room should be built into the schedule.

Clean and disinfect all surfaces in contact with visitors (including service areas) more often than usual. Particular attention must be paid to surfaces and objects that are frequently touched, such as tables, countertops, service counters, railings, chairs, light switches, door handles, locks, knobs, remotes, taps and faucets, toilet flush buttons/handles, cloakroom numbers, payment terminals, keypads, electronic ordering and feedback systems, touchscreens, phones handed out to staff, walkie-talkies, headsets, microphones and tablets, etc.

In addition to ordinary waste bins, there should be a sufficient number of foot-operated bins for discarding facemasks, marked accordingly.

Ventilation and airing out rooms

Check with the venue whether they have a well-functioning and compliant air exchange/ventilation system. If the building does have such a system, it must be operating at maximum level while the building is in use and at least two hours before and after people have been in the building. If the building's ventilation system circulates air back into the rooms, it must be completely switched to outdoor air as the source.

In a building where there is no heat-return inflow and exhaust ventilation or where such a system is not working, the rooms must be aired out manually actively. For example, a room where a gathering was just held should be aired out for 15 minutes before the next people enter the room, and rooms should be aired out at least once an hour.

Introduce longer breaks (a minimum of 30 min) between stage sessions. During the breaks, people should be directed to leave the auditorium so that it can be aired out – even if normal ventilation systems are functional.

ORGANIZING TEAM AND SERVICE STAFF

The event organizer is responsible for ensuring that the organizing team and service personnel are aware of and follow the valid Covid-19 prevention guidelines in their everyday work. Train the organizing team on measures for prevention of Covid-19 and give

clear instructions on what action to take in an emergency. Designate one of the members of the organizing team as a Covid-19 prevention specialist who will monitor compliance with the requirements.

Map the potential risks, analyse the hazards, and think about how to mitigate these risks. Also be prepared in the event that someone on the organizing team might fall ill – make sure that there is more than one person in the organizing team to take on the responsibilities of a team member who is ill. Use a combination of workplace and home office so that if one staffer falls ill, the whole team is not unavailable due to self-isolation requirements. Also map out the risks of the event in cooperation with the venue and agree on an action and logistics plan should any risks materialize.

Ensuring health safety requires additional roles on the organizing team and it will also take more staff than usual. Facemask distribution points, monitoring of compliance with distancing requirements, changes to food service arrangements, regular disinfection of surfaces, logistical routing of queues, duplication of positions to cope with the risk of infection – all of these will require additional staff.

The organizing team and service staff must wear personal protective equipment (e.g., facemasks, face shields, gloves) and observe hygiene and safety requirements throughout the event. Make sure that the organizing team has a sufficient supply of personal protective gear.

Be prepared for government restrictions to change on short notice – if in-person events are suddenly disallowed or the participant limit is unexpectedly reduced, be prepared to hold part or all of the event virtually or to postpone or cancel it. Agree with your partners on conditions that provide as much flexibility as possible for postponement and cancellation, and set a "turnback" date – the latest day that the event can be postponed/cancelled.

Get contact information (phone number, email address) for each member of the organizing team (including volunteers) and service staff so that they can be contacted quickly if necessary. The contact info may be needed if government restrictions change at short notice, or someone falls ill and contact tracing needs to be done.

For larger events, use the help of an experienced management company with experience in organizing hybrid, virtual and 100% in-person events in pandemic conditions.

SPEAKERS AND OTHER ATTENDEES

Attendees and speakers from foreign countries are subject to the same requirements as anyone arriving in Estonia: a person can participate if they 1) have no symptoms of illness can participate and 2) have completed the necessary period of self-isolation or arrived from a country that was exempted at the time of entry. Those certified by a physician to have recovered from COVID-19 less than six months ago and those who have completed the full

vaccination course less than six months ago are likewise exempt from the 10-day self-isolation requirement (whether they are coming from within or outside Europe).

Bear in mind that conference speakers are vulnerable to different risks, such as falling ill, the need for unexpected self-isolation, and in the case of foreign participants, changes in travel restrictions. Set up the necessary technical solutions so that the speakers can speak or participate in panel discussions across a video bridge, or record keynote presentations in advance.

PARTICIPANTS AND COMMUNICATION

Advance registration and notification of participants

Participants in the event should be registered if possible, and electronic advance registration is the preferred way to do this. Collect the contact information (phone number, email address) of each participant so that they can be contacted quickly if necessary. The contact information may be needed if the country's restrictions change at short notice, or someone falls ill during the event and contact tracing needs to be done.

Introduce the rules for participating in the event (see the Reminders for Attendees in the appendix) and the measures to prevent Covid-19 in advance over your communication channels (event website, social media, press releases, etc.) and in pre-event communication with the participants. Anyone who is ill, feels poorly, is in a high-risk group risk, have come into contact with a COVID-19 positive person or have just arrived from abroad and are subject to restrictions in this regard should be asked not to participate. If your event requires a mask or participants will have their temperature taken at the entrance, let the participants know in advance.

Inform participants in advance of the conditions for modifying or cancelling their registration due to the spread of COVID-19. Share information about making changes to participation/pass, risk-free changes to the participation format (e.g., virtual participation instead of in-person participation), finding a last-minute substitute, cancelling (at no extra cost) or buying back their event pass.

Give both participants and speakers instructions on distancing and responsible conduct in the venues. Advise participants to arrive on time to avoid queues.

If participants are assigned specific numbered seats, inform them of this in advance.

If you plan to have participants wear their event passes on beckband, email the pass to each participant in advance and ask them to print it out and bring it to the event.

Emphasize that government restrictions on events can change at short notice, so last-minute changes to both the organization of the event and the programme are a possibility.

Recommend that participants install and use the HOIA tracing app.

Requirements for participants from abroad

Attendees and speakers from foreign countries are subject to the same requirements as all those arriving in Estonia from abroad: a person can participate in the event if they are free of illness symptoms AND either completed the necessary self-isolation period, did not arrive from a country at risk or have been vaccinated or fully recovered from Covid-19.

If your event will have international visitors, make sure that the conditions for participating in the event, measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and the Reminders for Attendees are also made available to foreign participants at an early stage.

On-site information for participants

Participants in the event must also be informed of the conditions of participation when they enter the event area. The information can be conveyed in the form of text and pictograms on site, over closed-circuit radio, over the public address system, on digital screens and via the event's own app. Ask the host/event moderator to remind participants of the rules at the beginning of the event.

At the end of breaks and at the close of the event, encourage participants to exit in a dispersed manner.

Encourage event participants to install Estonia's HOIA mobile app, which alerts the user if they have come into close contact with an infected person and provides primary guidelines for further action.

Inform participants whom they should contact if they have questions or unexpected health concerns during the event.

CATERING

Make sure that event's catering partner and event venue ensure the provision of responsible catering services and services, based on the current procedures instituted by the Health Board and the Veterinary Board of the Republic of Estonia.

Have conference attendees leave the auditorium during the breaks to allow the conference room to be aired out.

Refreshment breaks should be held in a larger area so that there is sufficient space between the participants.

Avoid queuing, add more food service points than usual, and extend the duration of the refreshment break.

Provide contactless catering service. Opt for personally pre-packaged food portions. Each participant should also receive single-use food utensils. This reduces the possibility of cross-contamination as well as queuing time. Packaging should be as environmentally friendly as possible (biodegradable materials).

When serving beverages, opt for bottled products and disposable coffee cups that can be closed with a lid instead of self-service water and juice jugs.

Coffee, tea, and creamer should be dispensed by a server so that everyone does not handle the jugs.

Catering with table service is recommended – each participant with their own assigned seat, meals are brought to the tables by the server or placed on the tables beforehand in single, ready-to-consume portions. This solution significantly reduces contacts between various service providers and visitors. Consider providing more tables and seating fewer guests at each table. Assign seats ahead of time.

When serving buffet-style, the food should be served by a server. This way, multiple attendees do not handle the same ladles.

Hand sanitizer or hand wash stations must also be available in the catering area.

Service personnel must wear personal protective equipment (protective masks, gloves, face shields, etc.).

During the summer, arrange outdoor catering, if possible.

ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITIES FOR MAKING THE EVENT AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE

Scan body temperature as attendees enter the venue.

Offer rapid testing on site.

Require a negative coronavirus test result or vaccination certificate.

Station medical staff on site throughout the event.

Split up attendees into smaller groups in separate zones in the audience area (with a correspondingly marked ticket or invitation). Ensure that participants in the separate zones do not come into contact with each other (provide separate catering areas and other services).

Spread out the participants.

Distribute a "First Aid Kit" to guests on arrival: facemask + hand sanitizer + disinfectant wipes.

Ask attendees to complete health surveys either before the event or on each day of the event via a mobile application)

Distinguish participants with colour codes (different-colour wristbands for those who want to socialize with others and those who do not)

Install additional portable air purification and humidification equipment at the site.

Appendix 1:

REMINDERS FOR ATTENDEES

1. If you feel ill or have been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person, stay home
2. Keep a safe distance
3. Disinfect or wash your hands whenever possible
4. Wear a mask indoors for the duration of the event
5. At the event, sit only in the seat assigned to you
6. Arrive at the event on time so that there is enough time to enter in a dispersed fashion and there is no crowding during check-in
7. Download the HOIA mobile app, which notifies you if you have been in close contact with a coronavirus carrier
8. Elbow bumps instead of handshakes, and hug with your eyes!

Appendix 2

BASICS FOR ORGANIZING AN EVENT RESPONSIBLY

1. Ask participants to wear a facemask. Provide the option of purchasing a mask at the event.
2. Ask all participants to register and provide their contact details (phone number) – this is in case you need to contact the participants quickly (due to someone's illness or a change in the event).
3. Ask people with symptoms to stay at home, suggest alternative ways of participating (finding someone to substitute for them, virtual participation, offer to buy back their event pass). Inform attendees about the conditions of participation and measures to prevent COVID-19 both via the event's communication channels (website, social media) and at the event itself.
4. Ensure distancing between event participants (dispersed seating and table arrangement). Avoid queues at check-in, in the food service area, in the cloakroom area and outside the rest rooms.
5. Assign specific seats (for both the conference and food service) to participants.
6. Make sure there is enough hand sanitizer at the event. Set up the sanitizer dispensers along the main trajectories and heavy-traffic areas. Also disinfect microphones and presentation equipment after each user.
7. Clean and disinfect all surfaces in contact with visitors (including service areas) more often than usual. Particular attention must be paid to surfaces and objects that are frequently touched with the hands.
8. Use contactless solutions (dispersed distribution of materials in hard copy, digital access control, information display on digital screens and in the event app)
9. Arrange catering safely (food and beverages in single-use packaging, enough space and tables in the food service/consumption area, plenty of food service points)
10. Ensure that speakers, organizing team and service staff wear personal protective equipment and follow established safety rules.
11. Be prepared for the possibility of unexpected illnesses or speakers and staff members having to be in self-isolation, and come up with a contingency plan.
12. Be prepared for changes in government restrictions at short notice, and plan ahead for alternative solutions (virtual event, postponement, cancellation, etc.)



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