

COVID-19 FAQ

Commencement ceremonies give students, their families, teachers, and institutions an opportunity to celebrate an important milestone and are permitted in Los Angeles County. The following **recommendations** outline prevention strategies schools and institutes of higher education (IHE) can take to protect students, staff, and attendees from COVID-19 during commencement.

What do schools and IHE need to do to keep commencement safe?

It is recommended that your institution consider implementing all or some of the following control measures to ensure a safe commencement ceremony.

Individual Control Measures

- Post [COVID-19 prevention signage](#) in visible areas.
- Check for [proof of vaccination](#) or [proof of a recent negative test](#) for all attendees and staff.
- Encourage masking and distancing, especially in crowded areas and indoor areas. Create additional distance between the stage area where speakers will be giving speeches or remarks and the general audience.
- Implement an [entry screening](#) process for all attendees to screen for COVID-19 symptoms on the day of the graduation ceremony before they enter the facility.

Venue Control Measures

- Host the commencement ceremony and photo ops outdoors, whenever possible.
- Communicate in writing to all graduates, their household members, school personnel and others who may attend that if they are feeling ill, have symptoms of COVID-19 or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, they should not attend the event.
- Consider having students and guests register for the event online, prior to commencement so organizers are aware of the number of attendees and can plan accordingly.
- Promote healthy hand hygiene by including hand sanitizer stations at entrances and exits and ensuring bathrooms remain well-stocked with soap and paper towels.
- If multiple ceremonies will be held in the same venue, wait a minimum of two hours in between ceremonies to allow complete turnover of attendees without mixing across groups and to enable sufficient time for complete air exchange in indoor venues.
- Optimize air ventilation/filtration for indoor events. Make sure your building's HVAC system is in good, working order. Contact your HVAC professional and ask them about:
 - Whether installing MERV 13 filters is feasible;
 - How to set the HVAC system to 100% outside, non-recycled air, during your events or areas with more crowding; and
 - The number of Air Changes per Hour (ACH) in areas of your business. Having 2-6 ACH is recommended.
 - See [CDPH Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#).

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Where can we hold the commencement ceremony?

Commencement ceremonies can be held either indoors or outdoors, though outdoors is strongly preferred.

Which guidance should I be following?

This will depend on the size of your attendance, which includes all guests, students, faculty, and staff. Attendance thresholds of your commencement will determine which guidelines to follow.

- For indoor events with less than 1,000 attendees and outdoor events with less than 10,000 attendees, refer to the [Smaller Events and Cultural Institutions Guidelines](#).
- For indoor events with more than 1,000 attendees and outdoor events with more than 10,000 attendees) refer to [Best Practices to Prevent COVID-19 at Mega Events](#).

Is masking required?

- **Masks indoors** are not required for commencement ceremonies, but remain a strong recommendation for all attendees, regardless of vaccination status.
- **Masks outdoors** are not required but are recommended for individuals at higher risk of severe illness if they cannot maintain distance from others.
- *Note, schools and IHEs may have stricter mask policies for their events if they choose to do so.*

Is it required to show vaccine verification or proof of negative test?

At this time, there are no State or County requirements to prove vaccination status or show a negative test result for entry to indoor and outdoor events of any size. However, requiring this for your commencement event is one recommended strategy to reduce the risk of transmission at the event.

What guidelines should employers/employees follow for commencements?

Employers/employees must follow the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the [LA County Health Officer Order](#). Employers are required to offer medical grade masks and respirators for voluntary use to employees who work indoors and in contact with other workers, customers, or members of the public.

What is the current travel advisory for out-of-state or international attendees?

There are no travel restrictions specific to commencement ceremonies. Individuals traveling domestically or internationally to attend commencement in LA County should follow the [LA County Department of Public Health Travel Advisory](#).

Do I have to file an application or safety plan with LA County Department of Public Health to hold a graduation ceremony?

No, there is no application to file with the county to host a commencement ceremony.

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May we serve food or beverages at the graduation ceremony?

Yes, food and beverages may be served at the graduation ceremony but it is strongly recommended that refreshment areas be set up in outdoor areas where possible and attendees be encouraged to remain outdoors while eating and drinking, since no one will be wearing a mask while doing so. For buffet tables, signage and prompts are recommended so that attendees form lines with safe distancing and avoid crowding.

Can graduates receive their diplomas in a procession?

Yes, graduates may receive their diplomas as part of a procession, though it is recommended modifications be made to the usual process. If graduates will be walking across a stage, direct them to come up to the stage in small, staggered groups, and maintain distance from others as they proceed to and from the stage to avoid crowding. Ushers should be available to direct graduates to enter the stage from one side and exit from the other.

Consider having graduates pick up diplomas, certificates, and/or awards from a table instead of handed directly from one individual to another. Displays of congratulations such as hugs, high fives, and yelling or chanting are not prohibited, but create additional risk at events and gatherings.

Can we hold receptions before or after the graduation?

Yes, receptions are permitted before or after the graduation, and should follow the [Smaller Events and Cultural Institutions Guidelines](#) and [DPH Food and Beverage Service recommendations](#). Outdoor gatherings are safer as they pose a lower risk of COVID-19 transmission than indoor gatherings. If food or drinks are served, it is recommended that guests eat and drink outdoors.