Dear colleagues,

Recent days have brought changes to our campus—thank you all for your attention to the event-related hygiene and audience management recommendations outlined in the 3/5 announcement detailing MIT’s plans in response to the developing public health danger of the COVID-19 virus. We want to reiterate that there’s no identified risk to the MIT community associated with COVID-19 right now. You can find the latest updates at MIT Medical’s website.

However, we all have questions about how to interpret these guidelines and with the situation being subject to late-breaking developments, we need to remain alert and flexible. You may be wondering how to evaluate your upcoming events and decide whether to hold them. Following these excerpts from the official policy are a few points to help you adhere to the spirit of the MIT plan as it stands now.

**Excerpts from the March 5, 2020 announcement**

- Read the entire announcement, including travel information

Visitors from countries which the CDC finds have “widespread sustained (ongoing) transmission” of COVID-19 cannot join us on campus until they have successfully completed 14 days of self-quarantine.

Other visitors are welcome at MIT. However, common sense dictates that the next two months are not the best time to host large groups.

To protect children and older visitors to campus, we ask that you:

- Cancel or reschedule all K–12 programs and visits to be held at MIT from now through May 15.
- Consider postponing a meeting if your visitors are over the age of 60.

Effective immediately, if you are planning any in-person MIT event with more than 150 attendees that will take place between now and Friday, May 15, on campus or off campus, you must postpone, cancel, or “virtualize” it.

We chose 150 people as a threshold to help reduce risk of transmission without calling a halt to all activity on campus. However, group size is only one factor to consider in planning an event—and our success in managing the risk of COVID-19 depends not only on the existence of these policies, but on your cooperation and common sense.
As you plan events with fewer than 150 attendees, please consider these factors:

1. How many people will attend, and will they be in close quarters? In some cases, it may make sense to go ahead with an event but to reduce the attendance well below 150. Even with fewer people, if your event is planned for a confined space, you may want to choose a larger site, allow people to participate remotely or both.
2. How many participants will be coming from abroad, or from US locations with high infection rates? Given the changeability of travel restrictions, international visitors may face difficulties coming from or returning to their home countries.
3. What do you know about the age and health of expected attendees? Evidence to date suggests that COVID-19 hits certain vulnerable populations harder, including older individuals. Whatever the size of your event, consider postponing it if many attendees will be over the age of 60.
4. What is the risk to staff who will help prepare for your event, serve your guests and clean up afterward? Staff working for outside service vendors may not have generous health insurance or sick leave, and we should take steps to help keep them safe.

For all events of every size:

- Encourage handwashing!
- Make it easy for your guests to practice good health hygiene: provide hand sanitizer and tissues and minimize communal food.
- Educate your attendees about proper precautions.
- Urge anyone who feels unwell to stay home and to participate online if possible.
- You may also want to arrange for enhanced cleaning of the event site, before and after.

These policies and guidelines reflect MIT’s official position as of March 5, 2020. In this fluid situation, they may need to change in the future with little warning.

**Interpretation and action**

- If you are holding an event, communicate basic hygiene direction to your guests/attendees and advise them of MIT’s COVID-19 response policy statement. Encourage staff and guests to stay home if they do not feel well. Post hygiene reminders onsite.

- Cancel or reschedule all K–12 activities through May 15 (no exceptions), as well as those that increase the possibility of exposure to participants over age 60. See the CDC recommendations for high-risk groups. Please know that the COVID-19 response working groups are aware of upcoming summer programs and will be in touch soon with further guidance.

- Not sure whether to go ahead? Think about whether a given activity is mission-critical. Does it advance education and research? Does it help someone complete degree requirements? At this time, events of 150 or more that are curricular or credit-bearing will be allowed to continue. The aim is to reduce the risk of transmission without stopping MIT’s core activities.

- If the benefits of the activity are social or community-building, could it be reformatted or rescheduled? Could you meet in smaller groups? Would it be possible to bring people together via WebEx or similar? Could you webcast a program and ask the audience to stay home?
Does your original event plan include the presence of more than 150 people (including administrative and service staff)? If so, come up with a plan to manage attendance via tickets (this can be as simple as a slip of paper at a check-in table) or counting people as they enter. Can you allow physical distance between people? If there is no way to manage the audience, then cancelling or rescheduling is the better choice.

Current guidelines do not prohibit MIT people from gathering off-campus in groups smaller than 150 for social/cultural purposes (for example, dining out or visiting a museum). However, please consider whether undertaking that activity is necessary at this time.

Risk of exposure can “stack.” For example, a buffet dinner at an event with a large number of people includes two layers of risk. If you do need people to gather, what can you do to remove layers?

Update your publicity: MIT Events Calendar listings, Infinite Display slides, websites, social media, and posters may all be adjusted to keep people informed. Stay tuned to MIT News.

Specific event-related questions may be sent to covidevents@mit.edu.

Catering

If you decide to go ahead with an event AND it must include food, talk with the caterer regarding mitigating risk.

- Avoid communal food. Actions such as switching from a platter of sandwiches to individually wrapped sandwiches can reduce the risk of exposure. When this public health crisis subsides, you can reevaluate catering choices that balance hygiene with sustainability.

- If you must offer a buffet, place it in a low-traffic area and have the catering staff serve guests, if possible. This reduces the number of people who touch the same serving implement and the risk that the implement will be dropped into the dish, contaminating the food.

- Ask the caterer what their plans are to increase vigilance to hygiene (such as wearing gloves and increasing staff training, individual packaging, and frequency of surface disinfection).

- Don’t leave food out at the end of your event.

- Don’t reuse plates.

- Keep lids and covers over food as much as possible.

- If you have not already made cleaning arrangements with MIT Custodial Services, do so now. Their teams are prepared to execute thorough cleaning following events.
Contracts and travel

- Our colleagues in the Vice President for Finance area have developed an FAQ to offer Guidance on Canceling and Expensing Travel and Events Following MIT’s New Policy in Response to COVID-19.

- At this time, MIT’s COVID-19 guidelines do not prohibit visitors to campus, but do connect with your expected guests, especially if they are traveling here from afar. Stay alert to the CDC travel advisories.

- For further guidance with specific travel-related queries, send a note to covidtravel@mit.edu.

Prospective students

- As mentioned in the 3/5 announcement, Campus Preview Weekend will not be held this year. Your areas may receive questions from prospective students—for further updates, please see the pinned blog post MIT’s COVID-19 precautions and their impact on admissions.

Again, thank you for your attention to this information—we appreciate the effort each of you is making to modify your plans in the interest of public health and that of the MIT community.

Take care of yourselves,
Gayle M. Gallagher