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# Africa CDC Policy Recommendation for African Union Meetings and Travel During COVID-19 Outbreak

## Background

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can be readily transmitted human-to-human through small respiratory droplets and particles. The emergence of new more deadly and transmissible variants of concern, like the Delta variant, have made the pandemic even more difficult to control. Specifically, the Delta variant is more than two times as contagious as previous variants of the virus.<sup>1</sup> For Africa, the circulation of these more transmissible variants in conjunction with the low COVID-19 vaccination coverage make the continent's population more vulnerable and at risk of COVID-19 infections. Public health and social measures (PHSM), like wearing masks, physical distancing, and avoiding large gatherings, are still effective at reducing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2.<sup>2</sup> The global consensus has been to defer mass gatherings<sup>3</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic as they can rapidly amplify infectious disease transmission and lead to new outbreaks of community transmission. The transmissibility and severity of COVID-19 have led many countries and organizations to minimize international travel and delay public gatherings of any size, not just mass gatherings.<sup>4</sup> In response to the evolving pandemic, Africa CDC has revised and updated its guidance for the African Union regarding meetings and travel to meetings in Africa.

## Definitions

- Meeting: any event in which persons from different households assemble in a specific location for a fixed period. For this document, "meeting" refers to any event organized wholly or partially by the African Union or any event that includes representation by African Union staff. This includes hybrid meetings where people assembling together in-person to participate in a virtual format with other meeting attendees.
- Large meeting: a meeting involving at least 50 or more persons.
- Mass meeting: a meeting involving 1,000 or more persons.
- International meeting: a meeting in which one or more participants cross an international border to attend the event.

## Recommendations for Meetings

1. Meeting organizers should always consider whether the meeting, regardless of size, can achieve similar outcomes if held virtually, e.g., audio or video conference. **If yes, the meeting should be held virtually.**
2. Does your meeting involve 1,000 or more persons (mass meeting)? **Postpone meeting until further guidance is issued.**

1 US CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html>

2 Africa CDC tiered PHSM framework: <https://africacdc.org/download/covid-19-tiered-public-health-and-social-measure-framework-for-africa/>

3 Mass gatherings are events characterized by the concentration of people (e.g. 1,000 people or more) at a specific location for a specific purpose over a set period of time that have the potential to strain the planning and response resources of the host country or community. WHO - <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/10665-332235>

4 WHO PHSM data set: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/phsm>

3. Does your meeting involve 50 or more persons (large meeting)?
  - a. International participant(s): ***Postpone meeting until further guidance is issued. Rare exceptions can be made for important and urgent meetings. If the meeting will have a near-term impact on health, safety, and/or security or failure to hold the meeting could impact health, safety, and/or security, hold the meeting with adequate public infection prevention and control measures in place [see below].***
  - b. No international participants: ***Hold the meeting and institute public infection prevention and control measures [see below].***
4. Does your meeting involve <50 persons?
  - a. International participant(s): ***Consider postponing meeting. If the meeting will have a near-term impact on health, safety, and/or security or failure to hold the meeting could impact health, safety, and/or security, hold the meeting with public infection prevention and control measures in place.***
  - b. No international participants: ***Hold the meeting and institute public infection prevention and control measures [see below].***

## Public Infection Prevention and Control Measures

### 1. Before the event

#### Meeting Organizer(s)

- a. Assess risk in accordance with guidance from Africa CDC, WHO, and local and national public health authorities to decide whether to proceed, postpone, or cancel gathering.
- b. Designate an individual or individuals to be responsible for implementing and monitoring adherence to these infection prevention and control measures.
- c. Obtain the contact information for the ambulance, hospital, and/or public health agency to call if a participant or worker develops illness consistent with COVID-19.
- d. Ensure that the facility has adequate facilities for hand hygiene, including soap, water, and hand towels, alcohol-based hand rub, and/or other disinfectants.
- e. Designate an area at gathering location for participants who develop symptoms and need to wait for a health assessment.
- f. Assure that medical staff are available and ready on-site to diagnose (with NAAT or Ag-RDT testing) and treat symptomatic participants.

#### Participants

- a. Advise participants to become fully vaccinated prior to the event and provide a virtual participation option for participants who are unable to fully vaccinate or prefer to not travel to the event, including presenters.
- b. Provide repeated guidance to participants and workers that they should:
  - i. Stay home and not travel if they have fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory symptoms.
  - ii. Stay home and not travel if they are unvaccinated and a close contact of a person infected with COVID-19 within 14 days of the meeting start.
  - iii. Test negative for SARS-CoV-2 by NAAT/PCR or Ag-RDT<sup>5</sup> at least 72 hours prior to the event.

### 2. During the event

- a. Post prominent signs reminding participants and workers to not attend if they have symptoms of illness or are a close contact of a person with COVID-19.
- b. Provide simple means for participants to self-isolate and contact medical staff.

5 NAAT= Nucleic Acid Amplification Test; PCR = polymerase chain reaction assay; Ag-RDT= antigen rapid diagnostic test

- c. Encourage the use of non-contact greetings, e.g., elbow bump, Namaste/prayer, foot touch.
- d. Ensure washrooms, dining areas, and any other frequently touched surfaces are cleaned frequently.
- e. Require all participants to **always wear masks while inside a venue** and **outside when social distancing of 2 metres cannot be maintained**. Maintain a supply of surgical (simple) face masks for any participant or worker to use if they do not have their own.
- f. If possible, seat participants at least 2 metres apart, and minimize congregation at sanitary stations and distribution areas for food and drinks.
- g. For any food or drinks, ensure that these items are distributed without sharing of common utensils, dispensers, or dishware.
- h. Encourage all participants and workers to practice hand hygiene before eating, after eating, and after using the bathroom using soap and water, and/or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- i. Establish emergency communication mechanism with local public health authorities.
- j. If a person becomes ill with respiratory symptoms:
  - i. Isolate person immediately.
  - ii. Provide person with a face mask to help contain respiratory droplets generated from coughing and sneezing.
  - iii. Contact local health authorities.

### 3. After the event

- a. Ask participants and workers to contact the event organizer if they develop fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory symptoms within 14 days of departing the event to contact trace if needed.

Event organizers should share contact information, itineraries, and local transport and hotel information about any symptomatic participants with the relevant public health authorities.

### Recommendations for African Union Travelers Returning from Meetings

- 1. If African Union staff are found to be a close contact<sup>6</sup> of a person with COVID-19 during the meeting or travel, they should follow the most up to date global<sup>7</sup> or national quarantine guidelines of the country where they reside (e.g. stay at home (quarantine) for 14 days from the date of last contact).
  - a. During the quarantine period, they should avoid leaving the home, except for health or safety. They should contact AU Medical Services if they develop fever, cough, shortness of breath, or any other respiratory symptoms.
  - b. Quarantine exceptions should be considered on a case-by-case basis for personnel who perform essential functions, such as health and safety. Exceptions can only be granted if approved by the Ministry of Health and/or Africa CDC and AU Medical Services. Excepted individuals should be fully vaccinated and/or particularly vigilant about monitoring their own symptoms and, if they develop symptoms, they must seek medical care immediately.

<sup>6</sup> Close contact = someone who was less than 6 feet away from infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html>

<sup>7</sup> WHO: Considerations for quarantine of contacts of COVID-19 cases. <https://www.who.int/publications/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-IHR-Quarantine-2021.1>

## **ANNEX 1: Infection, Prevention and Control Guidelines**

**PURPOSE:** To define Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures and requirements for physical/face-to-face engagements. However, considerations should be made to adapting to virtual sessions if the risk assessment changes.

**SCOPE:** This procedure is applicable to all physical/face-to-face engagements for delegates and all personnel that are involved or servicing the meeting

### **RECOMMENDATIONS, SAFETY AND HYGIENE PROCEDURE**

- Minimise numbers of delegates to the barest minimum, conduct all pre-meetings and side meetings virtually, limit numbers of interpreters, assistants, AU staff servicing the events and service providers to the minimum.
- A team of IPC and surveillance experts from Africa CDC and/or the Ministry of Health of the host government must be assigned to provide required technical support to the planning and execution of the meeting. A health check station must be established at the venue with staff at all times.
- The Federal Ministry of Health must be fully engaged to ensure that public health measures during travel (airports, road transport) to the event are available. The assigned technical team must ensure there is testing and isolation capacity available if required. There must be facilities available for management of any positive cases during the events, including involvement from local health services and hotel accommodation for isolation of cases.
- A briefing must be provided for all delegates and attendees at the beginning of the meeting about the precaution measures
- Delegates and attendees must be tested prior to travel or upon arrival at the Airport of the host country. Consider providing testing to all delegates and attendees before departure and return to member states, this may vary according to national requirements.
- Ensure transportation from and to the airport is done with proper physical distancing avoiding any form of crowding.
- All meeting venues must have natural ventilation i.e. conference rooms with numerous windows that can be opened to ensure good air flow in the space (avoid air conditioning). **The use of air conditioning particularly on recirculating mode or fans is strongly discouraged.**
- All meeting venues should be set ahead of time with labelled seating areas, seating arrangements should be at least 2 metres apart. Make clear markings on the floor and/or on the chairs using tape, to indicate 2 meters distance anywhere that people will wait, queue or assemble.
- The meeting rooms and common areas need to be cleaned and disinfected after each use OR at least after each tea break and lunch break times a day, and time stamped.
- Individual paper disposal bags and covered dust bins for any used items tissue, masks, paper during the meeting etc. Disposal bins with visible signs should be available throughout the venue
- Ensure that there is free-flow of movement (entry and exit) of the delegates, consider using a one-way system for entry and exit into the building and all meeting venues
- Consider using electronic documents to reduce the use of consumables such as papers and pens. Tools and equipment (e.g., pens, computers, phones, microphones) should not be passed around to delegates. Where this is not practical, there must be processes in place for immediate disinfection after each delegates' use.
- Temperature check using non-contact thermometer, along with the attached questionnaire is mandatory before a delegate is allowed into the venue of the events. This should be done daily.
- Use of face masks is mandated throughout the events. Consider providing face masks to all delegates.

- Hand washing stations must be in place and easily accessible by the delegates (entrance, hall, toilets, etc.). Provide portable alcohol-based hand rub on each delegate's marked seating area. Ensure hygiene stations with alcohol-based hand sanitiser are foot pump operated or sensor operated; ensure there is adequate soap and water at all toilets.
- Social and physical distancing is mandated for activities such as queueing to access the meeting venues, sitting arrangement in the meeting venues, collection of items or food, and any other activity that may demand bringing the participants together.
- Social gatherings, side events or formal dinners are strongly discouraged, there should be minimal social mixing outside the official events.
- A simple guide on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing should be provided to all delegates in advance of the meetings so they know what is expected.
- Ensure that there are health advisories with visual cues/reminders on (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing etc) around the meeting venues to ensure all delegates are adhering to the public health measures.
- Group photographs are strongly discouraged.
- All meals should be pre-packaged as "takeaway"; no shared platters or serving utensils. Lunch and tea break must be done in outdoor spaces. Ensure that all breaks are staggered to limit congregation.
- Limit the number of service providers assigned to prepare and serve meals; ensure all service providers follow all hygiene guidelines and wear a mask.
- All the materials and consumables that are needed should be made available a day before the scheduled date for the meeting and it should arrive at the meeting venue before the commencement of the meeting.
- Electronic registration of all delegates with the following information such as age, address, mobile phone number, names of people in the entourage, other delegates with whom the attendee was in close contact, transit cities on the way to the event. All delegates must be registered as they enter each meeting room to facilitate contact tracing should there be a positive case.
- When travelling on aircraft, taxis, or personal vehicles you must not gather with others outside of your group. Try to keep within your group and distance yourself from others where possible.
- You must wear a face mask when using taxis or chauffeured vehicles. If you cannot keep a 2-metre distance inside vehicles, reduce the risk to yourself and others by maintaining a 1 metre distance where possible or by using screens between driver and passengers. This includes security staff and drivers. Keep air conditioners on non-recirculating air function or consider opening windows to encourage natural ventilation.

## ANNEX 2:COVID-19: Self-Declaration by Delegates<sup>8</sup>

Date (dd/mm/yyyy):	Time:
Name (Last, First):	Meeting Location: Meeting room:
Member State or Organisation (if applicable):	Time of entry: Time of exit:

If you answer **YES** to any of these questions, **notify the organisers immediately.**

1. Are you feeling ill?                      Yes                      No

2. Are you exhibiting any of the following symptoms?

Fever	Cough	Loss of smell or taste
Body aches	Headache	Shortness of breath
Sore throat	Runny nose	Tiredness

3. Have you travelled outside of \_\_\_\_\_ in the last 14 days?

Yes                      No

If yes, which province or country(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Travel Dates (Departure): \_\_\_\_\_ (Return): \_\_\_\_\_

Has anyone in your household or entourage been quarantined or identified as a COVID-19 confirmed or suspected case?                      Yes                      No

To your knowledge, have you been exposed to anyone who has been quarantined or identified as a COVID-19 confirmed or suspected case?                      Yes                      No

Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

4. During the course of this session, I agree to:

- Respect physical distancing (2 meters/6 feet)
- Wear a mask during all meetings and engagements with other delegates
- Wash my hands frequently and thoroughly or use alcohol-based hand rubs
- Respect all rules regarding touching surfaces, objects and food

I acknowledge and confirm all the above information and that I am not experiencing any of the above symptoms, and agree to report to the organisers immediately if symptoms occur.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_