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

## Background

Social distancing is an accepted strategy to delay and diminish outbreaks of respiratory infections, such as influenza. Similar to influenza, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can be readily transmitted human-to-human through respiratory droplets and contact with a contaminated surface. For pandemic influenza, the global consensus has been to defer mass gatherings, which have been defined as events involving more than 1000 people or events in which an outbreak could rapidly overwhelm existing health facilities. Mass gatherings can amplify infectious disease transmission at the event and lead to community transmission after participants return home. The transmissibility and severity of COVID-19 has led many countries and organizations to minimize international travel and delay public gatherings of any size, not just mass gatherings. Africa CDC has developed the following guidance for the African Union regarding meetings and travel to meetings in Africa.

## Definitions

Meeting = any event in which people from different households assemble in a specific location for a fixed period. For the purposes of 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.

Large meeting = a meeting involving at least 50 or more people.

Mass meeting = a meeting involving 1000 or more persons.

International meeting = a meeting in which one or more participants crosses 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.

2.  Does your meeting involve 1000 or more persons (mass meeting)? ***Postpone meeting until further guidance is issued.***

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 meeting with public infection prevention and control measures in place.***

      b.  No international participants: ***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 meeting with public infection prevention and control measures in place.***
      b.  No international participants: ***Hold meeting and institute public infection prevention and control measures.***

<u>Public Infection Prevention and Control</u>

1.  Before the event
      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.  Provide repeated guidance to participants and workers that they should stay home if they have fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory symptoms.
      c.  Provide repeated guidance to participants and workers that they should stay home if they have returned from an area with an outbreak of COVID-19 or have had direct contact with a COVID-19 patient.
      d.  Obtain the contact information for the ambulance, hospital, and/or public health agency to call if a participants or worker develops illness consistent with COVID-19.
      e.  Ensure that the facility has adequate facilities for hand hygiene, including soap, water, and hand towels, alcohol-based hand rub, and/or other disinfectants.
      f.  Designate an area at gathering location for participants who develop symptoms and need to wait for a health assessment.

2.  During the event
      a.  Post prominent signs reminding participants and workers to not attend if they have symptoms of illness, recent travel to a COVID-19 outbreak area, or direct contact with a COVID-19 patient.
      b.  Post prominent signs reminding participants and workers to use non-contact greetings, e.g., elbow bump, Namaste/prayer, foot touch.
      c.  Screen all participants and workers for symptoms of illness (above). Refuse entry to any participant or worker with fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory symptoms.
      d.  Ensure washrooms, dining areas, and any other frequently touched surfaces are cleaned frequently.
      e.  Do not encourage healthy people to wear masks. If possible, maintain a supply of surgical (simple) face masks to use for any participant or worker that develops cough or respiratory symptoms.
      f.  If possible, seat participants at least 1 meter (~2 seats) apart, and minimize congregation at sanitary stations and food and water distribution areas.
      g.  Encourage all participants and workers to practice hand hygiene before eating, after eating, and after using the bathroom using soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.
      h.  Establish emergency communication mechanism with public health authorities.

      i.   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.
   b. Event organizers should share contact information, itineraries, local transport and hotels about all symptomatic participants with public health authorities.
   c. Notify home countries of returning participants of any person who develops COVID-19 while attending the event.

Recommendations for African Union Travelers

1. African Union staff should follow Africa CDC guidance if they travel to an area with "local transmission" of COVID-19.
   a. The list of countries with "local transmission" is updated daily by the World Health Organization at: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports
   b. Africa CDC guidance is available at: http://africacdc.org/press-centre/fact-sheets-and-brochures/fact-sheets-and-brochures/guidlines-for-movement-and-monitoring-of-persons-eng-web-pdf/detail

2. If African Union staff were in an area with "local transmission," they should stay at home for 14 days after returning from that area. During those 14 days, they should not report to work and 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.

3. If African Union staff were in direct contact with a COVID-19 patient or spent time in a healthcare facility with a COVID-19 case in previous 14 days, they should immediately notify AU Medical Services, and AU Medical Services will work with Ethiopublic health officials to monitor the health of the staff person. During those 14 days, they should not report to work and should avoid leaving the home, except for health or safety.

4. 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 Africa CDC and AU Medical Services. Excepted individuals should be particularly vigilant about monitoring their own symptoms and, if they develop symptoms, seeking medical care immediately and reporting their history of travel to a COVID-19 area.