

COVID-19 Response Guidelines

For Convention Bureaus and MICE Business Operators

To Promote the Organization of Safe MICE Events during COVID-19

(Version 2)

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Japan Congress & Convention Bureau
(JCCB)

Table of Contents

1. Background and Basic Concepts of the Guidelines	3
2. Basic Concepts of the Guidelines.....	3
(1) Collaborate with relevant organizations.....	3
(2) Adhere to infection control principles.....	3
(3) Collect information required to prevent the spread of infection, routinely adjust preventive measures, and provide information as soon as possible	4
3. Infection Risk Assessments	4
(1) Ensure ventilation and social distancing in closed and crowded areas.....	4
(2) Avoid the risk of droplet transmission.....	4
(3) Sanitize surfaces and objects to prevent contact transmission	4
4. Scope of Application of the Guidelines.....	4
(1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and MICE business operators (sales and promotion activities)..	5
(2) Operations involved in the organization of MICE events (MICE preparatory/support operations)	5
5. Specific Infection Control Measures	5
(1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and MICE business operators	5
1) Sales and promotion activities to attract domestic MICE hosts (including invitation tours)	5
2) Overseas sales and promotion activities.....	6
(2) MICE preparatory/support activities	6
1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and other promotion organizations	6
2) General precautions to prevent infection when organizing MICE events	6
6. Others (Public Relations Activities for Safe and Healthy MICE Events)	7

1. Background and Basic Concepts of the Guidelines

These COVID-19 Response Guidelines has been developed by the Japan Congress & Convention Bureau (JCCB), based on the “Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control” published by the Government of Japan on May 4, 2020, and the “Analysis of the Response to the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)” and “Recommendations” compiled by the Expert Meeting on Novel Coronavirus Diseases Control on the same day. This includes documents such as “Examples of Practicing a New Lifestyle”, and other relevant documents that specifically define the basic principles for JCCB members, mainly convention bureaus and MICE business operators (including venue operators) to follow and share with MICE organizers, especially when attracting and supporting MICE events.

MICE events involve a wide range of operations, including attracting events, providing support during the planning stages, and receiving the participants. Because these settings require different infection control measures, separate guidelines have been developed for individual operations by relevant associations, such as venue management, hotel management, travel arrangements, and event planning and management.

Therefore, the “COVID-19 Response Guidelines” mainly focus on measures for the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), regional and municipal convention bureaus (hereinafter “Bureaus”), and MICE business operators, in collaboration with MICE organizers and other relevant parties, to ensure safe and infection-free events.

Since the promotion and organization of business events involve diverse stakeholders and participants from around the world, a summary of the COVID-19 Response Guidelines shall be translated into English and published and disseminated globally, in cooperation with JNTO and other relevant organizations, to present the fundamental health and safety standards incorporated into Japan’s efforts to promote MICE events.

These Guidelines were revised to Version 2 on December 15, 2020, to reflect the mass event restrictions imposed by the national government.

These Guidelines are subject to periodic updates based on the future infection control policies of national authorities, developments of the pandemic, and recommendations from experts.

Reference: Relevant guidelines published by other MICE associations (not in order) *TBA

- Japan Convention Management Association (JCMA)
- Japan Exhibition Association (JEXA)
- Japan Hotel Association (JHA)
- Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) and All Nippon Travel Agents Association (ANTA)
- National Kominkan Association

2. Basic Concepts of the Guidelines

Convention Bureaus and MICE business operators, in collaboration with MICE organizers and other relevant organizations, should take necessary and sufficient measures to prevent COVID-19 infections, collect and provide necessary information on the health and safety conditions of host cities, and take all possible steps to add value to MICE events organized in Japan.

(1) Collaborate with relevant organizations

When attracting and hosting a MICE event, the convention bureau and MICE business operators, in close collaboration with the event host and other relevant business operators, should take all possible steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, organize the event in a safe and contagion-free way, and make the event a success.

(2) Adhere to infection control principles

All those involved should always be aware of infection risks, or the Three Cs (*), and take care to avoid the 3Cs throughout the MICE operation process, including setting up a venue and organizing programs.

* Three Cs (3Cs)

- 1) Closed spaces with poor ventilation
- 2) Crowded places with many people nearby
- 3) Close-contact settings such as close-range conversations

(3) Collect information required to prevent the spread of infection, routinely adjust preventive measures, and provide information as soon as possible

All those involved should remain attentive to COVID-19 information provided by governmental agencies and other relevant organizations inside and outside Japan, update and modify preventive measures as needed, and play an active role in disseminating information on the latest COVID-19 measures and recommendations put in place by domestic authorities, with support from and in cooperation with JCCB and JNTO.

3. Infection Risk Assessments

Bureaus, MICE business operators, and MICE hosts should assess infection risks in advance by examining the two main transmission routes of COVID-19, (1) respiratory droplets and (2) close contact, taking into account the flow and contact of MICE business operators and participants, and develop risk management measures for their individual operations.

Moreover, it should be noted that because some programs and activities require a large number of people to travel, stay overnight, eat and drink together, and hold meetings, it is essential to assess risks associated with the use of large commercial facilities, such as hotels and conference halls, as well as potential hazards to the entire community surrounding the venue.

(1) Ensure ventilation and social distancing in closed and crowded areas

Consider whether it is possible, taking into account the capacity of the venue and the expected number of visitors, to practice sufficient social distancing (keep at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters between people) and whether some places hosting a certain number of people can be properly ventilated. In particular, careful attention should be paid to prevent eating and drinking in crowded places.

(2) Avoid the risk of droplet transmission

Ensure that the venue is properly ventilated and that people always wear face masks and practice social distancing in order to prevent droplet transmission while interacting with others. In particular, it is important to consider taking social distancing measures when needed, such as placing social distancing footprints and floor markers, posting guides around the venue, and making reminder announcements. It is necessary to prevent people from gathering close together, not only in meeting rooms, party halls, exhibition spaces, and other public areas but also in areas prone to crowdings, such as lobbies, cloakrooms, reception areas, restrooms, and smoking areas.

Moreover, it is necessary to remind participants not to take actions that spray respiratory droplets during the event, such as speaking loudly, playing certain musical instruments, singing, and talking while eating and drinking. Consider canceling the event if there is a high risk of droplet transmission.

(3) Sanitize surfaces and objects to prevent contact transmission

Identify surfaces and objects through which people directly or indirectly come into contact with others while traveling to and staying in the venue, such as doors, shared facilities (e.g. restrooms), hand towels, fixtures and fittings (e.g. chairs and tables), and distributed items (e.g. registration cards, stationery, and handouts), and sanitize them regularly. Review their use and explore alternative means.

4. Scope of Application of the Guidelines

These Guidelines apply only to (1) activities conducted by Bureaus and MICE business operators when communicating or collaborating with MICE hosts and other relevant entities (sales and promotion activities) and (2) operations involved in the organization of MICE events (MICE preparatory/support operations), except for infection control measures at work.

(1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and MICE business operators (sales and promotion activities)

- Use of virtual means to communicate with MICE hosts and other relevant entities
- Sales and promotion activities and visits to domestic host organizations
- Invitation of and discussions with domestic and overseas host organizations
- Overseas sales and promotion activities (e.g. attending business fairs)

(2) Operations involved in the organization of MICE events (MICE preparatory/support operations)

- Preliminary preparations and checks (including developing risk management manuals)
- Consultation and collaboration with local stakeholders

5. Specific Infection Control Measures

(1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and MICE business operators

1) Sales and promotion activities to attract domestic MICE hosts (including invitation tours)

- Carefully read the guidelines published by relevant associations as listed above and offer appropriate advice on the organization of MICE events. Give special publicity to the guidelines developed by the Japan Convention Management Association (JCMA) and the Japan Exhibition Association (JEXA).
- Ensure that all those involved download the COVID-19 Contact-Confirming Application (COCOA) developed by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and other local notification apps on their smartphones.
- Follow the recommendations put in place by the national and prefectural governments on domestic traveling, eating and drinking, and social gatherings.
- Conduct operations remotely, as much as possible, via phone, email, and online communication channels. Organize meetings and share presentations online.
- Take special care when traveling to and from cities and regions with many infected people.
- Refrain from non-essential visits to domestic host organizations. When visiting a host organization, visit in a small group, wear face masks, avoid the 3Cs, and remember to sanitize hands before and after the visit.
- Take the temperatures of employees and other staff regularly and ensure that those with a temperature of 37.5°C or higher do not come to work or visit clients but stay home and refrain from contact with others. In addition, make sure that those who have symptoms, such as fever, cough, fatigue, and loss of taste, within a few days before the planned visit refrain from the visit, regardless of whether their temperature exceeds 37.5°C.
- When visiting and meeting clients in person, avoid sitting right in front of them, always wear a face mask, and practice safe social distancing (at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters) to minimize infection risks. If possible, avoid gathering at night, during meals, or any other time when infection risk awareness is likely to decline.
- Minimize the number of people engaged in operations that involve travelling, making presentations, and dining with clients and set up an environment where you can avoid the 3Cs.
- Ensure that staff remain alert during break time by reminding everyone to wash and sanitize hands before taking a break, limiting the number of people in each lounge depending on its size, letting employees take breaks in shifts, installing acrylic partitions and screens, arranging seats to keep anyone from sitting right in front of any other person and ensure social distancing (at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters), reminding everyone to refrain from talking while eating and drinking, and properly ventilating rooms to avoid the 3Cs.
- When it is necessary to invite visitors, narrow down those in charge of meeting them to minimize the number of people involved. Ensure that the visitors follow infection control measures, such as wearing face masks and sanitizing and washing hands.
- When inviting visitors from abroad, proceed with the plan while keeping pace with the easing of entry restrictions to Japan. Satisfy the entry conditions set by the Government of Japan for each country/region and develop effective infection control measures in advance.
- Ask visitors from abroad to take out travel insurance. If possible, ask them to present health certificates (COVID-19 negative certificates issued by competent authorities) and other relevant medical records. Confirm that they can receive necessary tests and treatments, when needed, in the city or region where they stay.

- Before inviting visitors define the scope of responsibility of each party, in case problems arise, such as one of the visitors being diagnosed with COVID-19 during or after the visit.

2) Overseas sales and promotion activities

- When participating in an overseas business fair, decide whether to travel to the site by collecting local information, carefully checking the Overseas Travel Safety Information and travel restrictions published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and consulting with JNTO. Follow the infection control recommendations put in place by national authorities when returning to Japan.
- When participating in a business fair, carefully decide whether to attend in person by checking the infection control measures and precautions taken by the host organization in advance.
- Collect necessary information on buyers and other people you have contact with and properly manage the information in case you are infected.
- When accompanying a MICE host in their promotion activities, proceed after carefully analyzing the health and safety conditions of the destination country and checking whether the health and safety standards put in place there are adequate.
- Carefully check the travel restrictions, take out overseas travel insurance, and collect information on local medical services before traveling abroad.
- Give publicity to the substance of the guidelines developed by JCCB and other relevant associations and increase understanding of the safety precautions taken for each host city and each MICE event.

(2) MICE preparatory and support activities

When preparing for and supporting a MICE event, the Bureau and MICE business operators should encourage the event's host and other relevant entities (including venue operators and MICE operators) to take sufficient measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to develop risk management manuals in case infection occurs, as specified below.

In order to develop specific, thorough safety measures, the guidelines for MICE organizers and other relevant entities should be updated periodically based on the Guidelines on Hosting MICE Events in the COVID-19 Pandemic by the Japan Convention Management Association (JCMA) and other relevant guidelines.

Bureaus should take the following infection control measures for MICE events organized in their cities and regions and provide support to ensure that necessary and sufficient measures are taken based on the general precautions to prevent infection when organizing MICE events listed below.

1) Activities conducted by Bureaus and other promotion organizations

- Bureaus should ask for the understanding and cooperation of MICE hosts, either by themselves or through their members, to take infection control measures and make these measures widely known to participants in advance. Moreover, Bureaus should encourage MICE hosts to develop risk management manuals, including those for medical service systems, in case infection occurs.
- Bureaus should make these Guidelines and relevant associations' guidelines widely known to their members and local stakeholders and promote infection control measures.
- Bureaus should require sufficient measures to be taken, including wearing face masks, sanitizing, washing hands, providing proper ventilation, and practicing social distancing, to protect participants from the droplets and contact transmission while gathering and dining indoors or traveling.
- Bureaus should strongly encourage their members and MICE hosts to use the COVID-19 Contact-Confirming Application (COCOA) developed by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and other local notification apps.

2) General precautions to prevent infection when organizing MICE events

i) Before events:

- Ensure compliance with precautions and collect itineraries from participants
 - Make the safety precautions, including those related to health management, fully known to participants in advance and encourage them to take preventive measures by themselves. Ask participants to confirm whether any symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, phlegm, fatigue, and loss of taste) have developed, especially within a week before departure, and refrain from attending if any symptoms develop.
 - Record participants' lodgings, participating programs, and contact information, and collect itineraries from participants in advance.

- Take precautions for VIPs and overseas participants
 - Take preventive measures to minimize infection risks for guests, keynote speakers, and other VIPs while traveling, staying at hotels, and dining at restaurants near the venue.
 - Provide information in advance about the new measures to strengthen border enforcement imposed by the national government and other necessary infection control measures to overseas participants, who are expected to increase in number as restrictions on entry to Japan are being eased. Ask them to take out travel insurance in case they are infected, and translate the social distancing signs placed in the venue.

ii) During events

- Post infection control staff (ideally medical professionals) around the venue and set up a health system to take participants' temperatures, check for symptoms, and respond to any emergencies.
- Arrange seats and manage queues to ensure social distancing (at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters) between participants. Take the same precautions for areas prone to crowding, including traveling routes and outdoor spaces.
- Install social distancing partitions and practice necessary social distancing (at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters) between performers during their performance as well as between performers and participants.
- Ensure that everyone sanitizes and washes hands when entering and leaving the venue and put hand sanitizer dispensers at the entrance and other spots in the venue during the event.
- Ask participants to wear face masks indoors. MICE hosts should have unused face masks in stock to provide to those who do not have their own.
- Open doors or use ventilation systems to sufficiently freshen the air inside the venue on a regular basis. Clean and sanitize every corner and collect waste, in cooperation with contract maintenance service providers, to keep the venue sanitary.
- Gather the waste contaminated with bodily fluids, such as saliva and nasal discharge, into plastic bags and seal them tightly. Ensure that waste collectors wear face masks and gloves while working and wash hands with soap and running water after taking off their masks and gloves.
- Ensure that interactive sessions where participants talk and eat together (avoid buffet-style meals as much as possible) are held in an infection-proof place. Prevent the place from being crowded, arrange seats so that no one sits right in front of any other person, install social distancing partitions, practice necessary social distancing (at least 1 meter and ideally 2 meters), and make announcements or have guides to remind participants not to speak loudly.
- Sanitize surfaces and objects that are frequently touched by participants, such as microphones, mobile terminals and devices, door handles, chairs, tables, and restrooms, on a regular basis. Avoid directly handing documents and gifts to participants and convert paper documents into electronic form as much as possible.
- Refrain from using common towels in restrooms.

iii) After events:

- Collaborate with the event's host and other relevant entities and monitor whether any of the participants are infected for about two weeks after the event. If any such case is reported, provide necessary information to local stakeholders, participants, and other people involved, in collaboration with the local public health center, in order to prevent the spread of infection.
- Remind participants not to gather and to avoid the 3Cs when taking public transport and dining at restaurants on their way home.

6. Others (Public Relations Activities for Safe MICE Events)

Provide publicity about the safe MICE events organized in Japan by conducting active public relations through online and other channels, in cooperation with JNTO, to raise awareness about these Guidelines and the health and safety measures taken by national and municipal authorities and venue operators when organizing MICE events. Collaborate and share information with other relevant associations. In particular, any notable facilities and efforts should be given wide publicity inside and outside Japan to enhance understanding of Japan's health and safety mechanisms.

The important health and safety features of Japanese society should be presented, including the following:

- Japan has high-quality medical services and diverse health and safety systems not only for MICE facilities but also for restaurants, hotels, and retail stores.
- Japanese people have learned the importance of sanitary practices through school education. Most people have developed the habit of washing hands and gargling and wear face masks on a daily basis.
- The number of cases and deaths from COVID-19 is extremely low compared to other developed countries, and these cases are confined to limited areas.
- Pandemic data are collected and published on a daily basis by national and local authorities, and risks are calculated at the community and facility levels.