

Guidance on 2020 Graduation and Moving Up Ceremonies



A senior’s final year of high school comes with varying traditions designed to recognize and celebrate their K-12 experience, accomplishments and learning. We should all strive to find ways to individually and publicly honor the Class of 2020’s efforts and academic achievements, as well as other grade levels’ accomplishments, while honoring the Governor’s “Stay Home, Save Lives” guidelines that slow the spread of COVID-19.

Culminating celebrations include the graduation ceremony, baccalaureate events, senior prom, senior trips, senior breakfasts, assemblies and a variety of other events and important community traditions.

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a virus that has only spread as a disease in people since December 2019. The disease spreads person-to-person through coughing, sneezing and close personal contact. This includes touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that COVID-19 is most contagious when a person shows symptoms. However, the disease may also spread before symptoms appear. COVID-19 has the potential to cause severe illness or death. There is currently no cure or vaccine available.

Despite recent modeling that shows current efforts are “flattening the curve” or slowing the spread of COVID-19, Oregon is still in the midst of the outbreak and must continue to “Stay Home, Save Lives.” The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) recognize that this creates challenges for school districts and local communities that wish to provide students an opportunity to participate in the life milestone of a graduation ceremony or other year-end celebration.

Guidelines for Safe Year-End School Celebrations and Traditions

School districts can use the current science and common sense to help keep students and families in their communities safe and healthy, while offering a ceremony to mark graduation from high school. The most effective strategies to prevent infection include the physical distancing measures mandated by the Governor’s [Executive Order 20-07](#), and extended through [Executive Order 20-14](#).

Schools considering how to offer students, families and communities a graduation or recognition ceremony should consider how to:

- Create virtual recognition ceremonies or assemblies to acknowledge student accomplishments and transitions between levels (e.g., 8th to 9th grade).
- Reschedule celebrations to a time in the future when physical distancing measures may be relaxed.

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- Maintaining school honors for students (cords, medals, certificates, awards, honors, etc.), and distributing such to students in their homes. According to the CDC, it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way [the virus spreads](#).

In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging. Any risk should be managed by encouraging strict handwashing by both school staff as well as students before touching any materials to be transferred.

- Integrate student, staff and community voice to develop both personalized and public recognition for students in the graduating Class of 2020.
- Connect with other communities and districts to spark creative ideas. Some districts are thinking about planning parades (honoring social distancing) and others are working to invite special guests to deliver virtual key notes or special performances.
- Honor policies and practices that recognize the diversity of our students and families to promote cultural inclusivity and equity. ODE fully supports policies and practices that promote cultural autonomy and gives students the ability to wear items of cultural significance honoring their unique and diverse cultures. For example, some African Americans wear African kente cloths, some Mexican Americans wear a serape and some Muslim women wear a hijab. When centering the graduation needs of American Indian students and their families, a cultural practice for many is the wearing of culturally significant items such as eagle feathers, beaded caps, tribal insignias, moccasins and stoles during ceremonies.

Note: Any recognition, celebration or ceremony must be accessible to every student and family.

If districts choose to hold small group (no more than 25, if able to maintain 6 foot distance between participants), in-person year-end graduation gatherings, districts should communicate the following expectations to participants:

- If you are sick or have a family member sick with symptoms resembling the flu or coronavirus, stay home.
- Vulnerable people, such as those with [underlying conditions](#) and older adults should stay home.
- Maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet during any gathering.
- Wear a face mask.

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Districts should ensure that:

- The facility, including any nursery or children’s areas, seating areas, materials to be handled, etc. are thoroughly cleaned before and after the gathering ([CDC Cleaning Guidelines](#)).
- Hand sanitizer stations (at least 60 percent alcohol content) are easily located and accessible throughout the facility.
- Vulnerable people, such as those with [underlying conditions](#) and older adults, may attend virtually rather than in-person.

All Oregonians must do the following:

- Keep at least 6 feet from others during any events, gatherings and celebration and avoid all activities in which this physical distance measure cannot be kept.
- Cover coughs or sneezes in the bend of the arm or with a tissue and throw it away. Hand washing is recommended after coughing and sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth.
- Clean hands regularly and thoroughly with regular soap and water or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Isolate a person who is ill. Isolated persons must stay away from the event until 72 hours after both fever and cough resolve, without the use of medication.

Examples:

School districts around Oregon are thinking creatively about how to protect their communities and honor their graduates. Here are some **examples of year-end celebrations** that are being considered.

Football Field Ceremony: holding a graduation ceremony outdoors on both ends of a football field, with each end including a small group of students and families, i.e., two students, three administrators, and five to eight family members for each student.

- The following steps would be taken at the event to ensure the health and safety of all participants:
 - Accessibility to hand washing or hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
 - Keep at least 6 feet from others during the event.
 - All individuals wear face coverings such as cloth masks.
 - Students would have a scheduled time to arrive, participate in the short ceremony and vacate the stadium.

- This would allow the next group of students and family members to enter the stadium, while maintaining the ability to ensure no more than 25 people are present at any one time.

Drive In Ceremony: Holding a drive-up graduation ceremony in which families would stay in their cars and drive to their high school. The ceremony must be accessible to every student and family and the district must consider provisions for families that do not have access to a vehicle or cannot afford to operate a vehicle at this time.

- Families would drive up to a designated space at the school for the student to be handed their diploma.
 - Physical distancing measures (6 feet) must be maintained.
 - If people will have their car windows open, there should be one car length distance between each parked or idling car to make sure the distance is kept.
 - Face coverings should be worn during the diploma pick-up in the car.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Q: What are the size constraints for ceremonies?

A: [Executive Order 20-07](#) prohibits gatherings of more than 25 people if physical distancing of a minimum of 3 feet between people cannot be maintained. OHA recommends a physical distance of at least 6 feet.

Q: What are underlying conditions?

A: Underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk of serious COVID-19 for individuals of any age include:

- Blood disorders (e.g., sickle cell disease or on blood thinners)
- Chronic kidney disease as diagnosed by your doctor. Patient has been told to avoid or reduce the dose of medications because of kidney disease, or is under treatment for kidney disease, including receiving dialysis.
- Chronic liver disease as diagnosed by your doctor, (e.g., cirrhosis, chronic hepatitis). Patient has been told to avoid or reduce the dose of medications because of liver disease or is under treatment for liver disease.
- Compromised immune system (immunosuppression) (e.g., cancer treatment such as chemotherapy or radiation, receiving an organ or bone marrow transplant, taking high doses of corticosteroids or other immunosuppressant medications, HIV with a CD4 count <200, autoimmune disorders)

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- Current or recent pregnancy in the last two weeks.
- Endocrine disorders (e.g., diabetes mellitus)
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders) including diabetes.
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- Lung disease including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (chronic bronchitis or emphysema) or other chronic conditions associated with impaired lung function or that require home oxygen.
- Neurological and neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].
- Severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher).
- Any other underlying conditions identified by the OHA or CDC.

Thank you for celebrating Oregon's students and keeping them safe. Please contact [Patricia Stoneroad](#) at the Oregon Department of Education with any questions about this guidance.