

2021 Graduation and Commencement Ceremonies

The safety, health, and well-being of students, staff, and their families is our top priority. The Department of Health is providing the following guidance for public and private colleges and universities and public and private K–12 schools to utilize when planning 2021 graduation and commencement ceremonies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the [Healthy Washington Roadmap to Recovery Plan](#), these requirements provide safer alternatives to the traditional ways we celebrate graduation.

Decisions to host graduation and commencement ceremonies remain at the discretion of college, university, and local school district leaders, as long as they do not conflict with Governor Inslee’s prohibitions outlined in the Healthy Washington Roadmap to Recovery Plan. Colleges, universities, schools, and districts retain the authority to postpone graduation ceremonies.

Graduation Models and Requirements

The following ceremonies are all included in this guidance: graduations, commencements, moving up ceremonies, kindergarten roundups, and substantially similar activities.

Virtual (recorded or livestreamed) or drive-through ceremonies remain the safest way to celebrate, especially for families who have individuals at high risk for COVID-19.

K-12 schools and colleges and universities must follow Governor Inslee’s Healthy Washington Roadmap to Recovery guidance for [miscellaneous venues](#) and [outdoor spectator events](#) when planning for in-person graduation, commencement, or moving up ceremonies. In addition to mask and physical distancing requirements, this guidance will limit capacity depending on which phase the county where the school or college or university is located and outline additional requirements based on the event. Students who are graduating or moving up do not count toward the capacity restrictions. K-12 schools and colleges and universities should consider multiple, smaller events that do not overlap if capacity requirements are a limiting factor.

Keep in mind, the phase status for each county is individually evaluated every three weeks. While all counties moved into Phase 3 on March 22, 2021, it is possible the county in which the ceremony or event will be in Phase 1, Phase 2, or Phase 3 at the time the event is scheduled. Planning must adjust to any such changes in order to prioritize public safety.

Guidance for a Safer Graduation

Regardless of how you choose to celebrate, it is essential to keep the following in mind:

- **Wear a mask. Avoid close contact with people outside of your household.** All individuals in attendance must wear a face covering. Stay at least 6 feet away from all other people who are not part of your household, including while seated. Students must be seated at least 6 feet apart from one another and be spaced by 6 feet while queuing to enter, cross the stage, or exit.

- **Have a plan in place for staggered entrances and exits and other common places where people congregate in order to reduce the occurrence of bottlenecks.**
- **Do not shake hands. Sanitize your hands often.** Do not shake hands with each graduate or student. Consider using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol throughout the event if warm soap and water are not available.
- **Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of high contact areas and hard surfaces.**
- **[Ensure good ventilation and air quality.](#)**
- **Stay home if you are sick or were recently exposed to someone with COVID-19.** If you are sick, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, stay home and away from others.
- **Avoid social congregation before, during, and after the event.** Do not include side events (gaming/selfie areas, tailgating, and food cart/truck areas) to reduce the areas in which groups will gather, whether formally or informally.
- **Clearly communicate COVID-19 protocols in advance.**