

Note to Ms. Mari Skaare

Updated guidance on meetings management

1. Further to Dr Farmer's note of 29 April, I have continued to monitor the evolution of the COVID-19 outbreak in New York. The situation has improved, with intensity of transmission reduced, hospital admissions reduced, and deaths also mirroring this decline.
2. New York state, like many other states, has started a phased re-opening and New York City has announced that it will release some restriction on 8 June. This will be a time of increased risk with significant potential for a resurgence and re-intensification of community transmission. If this occurs, the city may revert to the current "Governor's Pause" arrangements.
3. With this unpredictable and likely fluctuating risk level, the timing for loosening restrictions must be on the cautious and more conservative side. Therefore, the Organization has decided to at least lag three weeks behind the city in its own phased re-opening (moving from the current phase zero to phase one) and be guided by adjustments the city is making in its own approach. In addition, the health and safety considerations for meetings are inseparable from health and safety considerations for support staff. Alignment of advice to OPGA with the recently established Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Group to the Crisis Operations Group (COG) will be most helpful moving forward. The Advisory Group has commenced its work on risk assessments for particular settings, tasks and meetings.
4. In view of the fact that the risk increases with the frequency of meetings and the number of participants, each meeting needs to be individually risk assessed. Proposed mitigation measures following this risk assessment will likely limit the number of participants for the sake of creating a reduced risk level that then needs to be accepted by the organizer of the meeting. Maintaining the current arrangements until 31 July with few, appropriately risk-managed exceptions for critical meetings, will allow stability during a period of uncertainty, as we evaluate the impact on transmission of the loosening of the current containment measures.
5. It is therefore my recommendation that in-person meetings should continue to be avoided when possible. Events should be virtual whenever possible. Where there is no other choice, in person meetings should have the absolute minimum number of participants, and all should maintain standards of physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Persons who are experiencing any symptoms of ill health should not attend.
6. Based on the current trajectory of the outbreak in New York City, it is possible that this advice could be revised for operations from July onwards, but my division will of course keep the situation under active monitoring.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'B' followed by a smaller, less distinct mark.

Dr Bernhard Lennartz

United Nations Acting Medical Director
2 June 2020