Navajo Department of Health announces graduation and promotion guidelines for schools to implement to help protect against COVID-19

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, the Navajo Department of Health announced the Navajo Nation graduation and promotion guidelines that require all schools to follow certain protocols to help reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 from person to person. All schools are also required to clearly communicate all requirements and guidelines to students, parents, and their families.

The guidelines allow for limited in-person outdoor graduation events for high school (seniors only) and college/university graduates. Only virtual/live-streamed or drive-thru graduation events are allowed for all other grade levels. The Navajo Nation graduation and promotion guidelines are available on the Navajo Department of Health website at: https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/Portals/0/PDF/RES/Graduation%20and%20Promotion%20Event%20Guidelines%20for%20ONDOH%20PHEO%202021-010%20FINAL%205.6.2021.pdf

“We understand that this is a very special occasion for graduates, their families, and for the schools. Last year, all in-person graduation ceremonies were prohibited because of the outbreak of COVID-19. Now that we have well over half of the adult population fully vaccinated, our public health experts have developed requirements and protocols for schools, students, and families to follow. We ask that each school comply with all requirements and guidelines to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. All schools are also encouraged to provide families and the public the option to watch graduation ceremonies online as well. I congratulate all of our graduates across the Navajo Nation and wish you and your families a safe and enjoyable graduation,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

For in-person outdoor high school and college/university graduation events:

- Graduation events must be held outdoors, no indoor events are allowed
- Events should only last two hours or less
- Face masks are required to be worn by all attendees at all times
- Each graduation event is limited to 50 or less graduates (multiple events may be held at separate times, at least 2-hours apart, to accommodate graduating classes larger than 50)
- School administrative staff attendance is not to exceed 40 or more
- Each graduate is allowed to have 1 to 4 guests and not to exceed 100 guests
- All attendees must pre-register to avoid on-site sign-in sheets, only those who pre-register will be allowed to attend in-person
- All attendees must be self-screened for COVID-19 symptoms using Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines
- Attendees can be screened for fever and COVID-19 symptoms before attending
- Guests/families that live in the same home may sit together, but each family group from separate households must be seated at least six-feet apart; schools are to provide visual markers to designate seating areas for each family
- Schools must maintain a record of all attendees for at least 30 days to assist with contact tracing. Information collected must include: name, date, phone number and email (if available). If a potential case of COVID-19 is associated with the graduation or promotion event occurs, this information must be provided within 24 hours, if requested, to contact tracers from federal (Indian Health Service) or Tribal health organizations. Seating charts must be provided.
- Graduates are to be seated at least six-feet apart from each other and all guests
- Diplomas are to be passed with no handshakes and no person-to-person contact
- Presenters and speakers may remove masks if they are at least 10-feet away from others. If singing or chanting is planned, performers need to be staged a minimum of 10 feet away from others while outdoors. Discourage audience members from yelling and other practices that may increase the likelihood of transmission from droplets.
- Graduates may remove masks for a professional photograph after receiving their diplomas. The individual must put their mask back on immediately after the photograph is taken. Graduates shall not remove their masks while standing in procession lines. Schools are encouraged to set up a designated area for photos to encourage physically distancing.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces including microphones
- Consider separate entrances and exits to the venue with one-way flow
- No food or drinks distributed during graduation events, except for bottled water
- No food/drink concession stands allowed
- Pre-packaged food/drinks may be distributed via drive-thru at a separate designated location to consume in vehicles or at home

For all other grade levels (kindergarten on up):

- Only virtual/live-streamed, drive-thru, car parade, or drive-in graduation events are allowed
- Only virtual/live-streamed is permitted for Head Start graduates
- One vehicle per household for each graduate for drive-thru, car parade, drive-in graduation events
- No food or drinks distributed during graduation events, except for bottled water
- No food/drink concession stands allowed
- Pre-packaged food/drinks may be distributed via drive-thru at a separate designated location to consume in vehicles or at home
The Navajo Nation graduation and promotion guidelines also recommend that eligible individuals receive the COVID-19 vaccine prior to attending a graduation event. It also outlines guidelines for post-graduation receptions and private gatherings at home.

“We are very proud of all of our students, teachers, administrators, parents, and many others who have provided support for our graduates, especially through the pandemic. Our students have persevered and worked hard to reach this point and we want all of our Navajo people to be able to safely enjoy graduation events. Please adhere to the guidelines and help to inform others,” said Vice President Myron Lizer.

For questions or concerns, please call the Navajo Health Command Operation Center at (928) 871-7014 or send an e-mail to nnhcocplanning@navajo-nsn.gov. The Navajo Nation graduation and promotion guidelines are available online at: https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/Portals/0/PDF/RES/Graduation%20and%20Promotion%20Event%20Guidelines%20for%20ONDOH%20PHEO%202021-010%20FINAL%205.6.2021.pdf

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For the latest news from the Office of the President and Vice President, please visit http://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/ or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES – WE ARE PROUD OF YOU – YOU DID IT!

Graduation and promotion events must adhere to the Navajo Nation Graduation and Promotion Event Guidelines pursuant to Public Health Emergency Order No. 2021-010. All schools are responsible for understanding and implementing the guidelines to prevent COVID-19 transmission. Graduations and commencements shall follow the guidance and are referred to as a “graduation or promotion event” in this document. Clearly communicate to students, parents and their families the steps be taken before, during, and after graduation or promotion events to ensure that the participants are aware of the safety protocols. We encourage individuals eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination to get it as soon as possible!

GRADUATION OR PROMOTION EVENT ATTENDANCE

It is strongly recommended that those who attend or participate:
- Be fully or partially vaccinated,
- Not currently required to isolate or quarantine due to a COVID-19 exposure or positive test result,
- Not currently sick or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or
- Not exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last two weeks.

Those recently tested for COVID-19 and waiting on results should not attend the event until negative results are received. We encourage individuals who are attending the graduation and promotion events at a school who are not fully vaccinated to be tested for COVID-19 in the 24 to 48 hours prior to attending a graduation event.

GETTING VACCINATED

- Individuals attending outdoor graduation events are highly encouraged to get vaccinated.
- Being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is the most important step people can take to make graduation events safer.
- If you would like information on making a vaccination appointment, contact the nearest federal (IHS) or Tribal health organization at https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine

FOLLOWING BASIC COVID-19 SAFE PRACTICES

Practice the three W's
- Wear a Mask: Mask wearing is mandatory. All participants must wear face masks prior to entering any venue, for the duration of events, and while receiving diplomas or other awards. Disposable masks must be made available for attendees.
- Wash Hands: Hand sanitizer or hand washing stations must be provided, convenient, and accessible.
- Watch Distance: Keep 6 feet away from others who do not live with you.

SCREENING PRIOR TO THE START OF THE EVENT

- All attendees of an in-person outdoor event, must pre-register to avoid onsite sign-in sheets. Only those who pre-register will be allowed to attend.
- All attendees must be self-screened for COVID-19 symptoms using the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.
- Attendees can be screened for fever and COVID-19 symptoms before attending the event.
COVID-19 SAFE PRACTICES:
Navajo Nation Graduation and Promotion Guidelines

FOOD OR DRINKS FOR GRADUATES AND THEIR FAMILIES

- No food or drink will be allowed during the event, except for bottled water.
- After the event, prepackaged (to-go) food and drinks can be distributed via drive thru at a separate, designated location to attendees for consumption at home or in vehicle.
- Concession stands will be closed due to increased risk of transmission of COVID-19.

HYGIENE AND SAFETY FOR SCHOOL-BASED ONSITE EVENTS

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and any areas before and after they are touched or used, such as seats, doorknobs, etc.
- Allow two hours in between events to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Schools must maintain a record of all attendees for at least 30 days to assist with contact tracing. Information collected must include: name, date, phone number and email (if available). If a potential case of COVID-19 is associated with the graduation or promotion event occurs, this information must be provided within 24 hours, if requested, to contact tracers from federal (Indian Health Service) or Tribal health organizations. Seating charts must be provided.
- Handshaking, elbow and fist bumps, and hugs should not occur between different household groups.
- Consider limiting the sharing or exchanging of materials, e.g., diplomas, awards. Students can have diplomas already in hand when they arrive.
- Clean and disinfect microphones after each use.
- Physical Distancing: School employees must be stationed appropriately to ensure compliance with all requirements and to limit congregation and crowding.

ENCOURAGE 6 FEET OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING BY OPTIMIZING EVENT LOGISTICS:
Model physical distancing with appropriate ceremony staging.

A procession of graduates is allowable if:
- Graduates are spaced 6 feet from other students and seated attendees.
- Diplomas are passed with no handshakes or physical contact.
- Families that live in the same home may remain together, closer than 6 feet, within one single “family pod.” Other family pods must maintain 6 or more feet of distance.
- Provide designated seating with visual markers (e.g., tape) to ensure separation between household groups. All attendees must be seated and remain in their seats throughout the ceremony.
- Plan arrivals and departures to ensure spacing throughout. Consider separate entrances and exits to the venue to allow one-way flow of attendees.

Presenters and speakers may remove masks if they are 10 feet away from others. If singing or chanting is planned, performers need to be staged a minimum of 10 feet away from others while outdoors. Discourage audience members from yelling and other practices that may increase the likelihood of transmission from droplets.

Graduates may remove masks for a professional photograph after receiving their diplomas. The individual must put their mask back on immediately after the photograph is taken. Graduates shall not remove their masks while standing in procession lines.
- Schools are encouraged to set up a designated area for photos to encourage physically distancing.
RISK LEVELS FOR A GRADUATION EVENT

Lower Risk Graduation Events (Preferred)
- Virtual/Live Streaming: with no physical contact.
- Drive-Thru/Car Parades: with no physical contact and support from local law enforcement.
- Drive in Gatherings: with no physical contact. See Navajo Nation Public Health Emergency Order No. 2021-010: drive-in gatherings of up to 50 vehicles are permitted

Moderate Risk: Outdoor Graduation Events
- The outdoor risk of COVID-19 spread is very low unless people are crowded for lengthy periods of time. No gatherings allowed.
- Outdoor in-person graduations will be limited on the number of students, teachers, school staff, security, and guests of graduates.
  > More than one procession may be necessary to reduce crowding.
  > Graduates will be organized into pods of 50. Graduates in one pod arrive at the ceremony and complete their procession with family members present. All individuals then exit the field. Then the next 50 graduates arrive for their ceremony. Cycle continues until all individuals have completed the ceremony.
  > Events may be staggered across multiple days.

Capacity Limitations by Event Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-Person Outdoor</th>
<th>Virtual, Live Streaming Drive Thru, Car Parade</th>
<th>Drive – In</th>
<th>In-person Indoor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>Seniors (12th grade) and College students</td>
<td>Kindergarten and up students</td>
<td>Kindergarten and up students</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of graduates</td>
<td>50 or less</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>50 or less</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative Staff</td>
<td>Not to exceed 40 staff</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>Limit to the minimum number needed to logistically support the event</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests per each graduate</td>
<td>1 to 4 guests per graduate (family pod) with physical distancing (depending on venue size)</td>
<td>One vehicle per household (Drive thru &amp; car parade)</td>
<td>One vehicle per household</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Capacity</td>
<td>Not to exceed 100 guests of graduates</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>Up to 50 vehicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Only prepacked food to be given at the end of the events. Food must be distributed via drive-thru in a separate designated location.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total time allowed</td>
<td>2 hours or less except for virtual and live streaming events</td>
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</tbody>
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POST-GRADUATION OR PROMOTION EVENT: RECEPTIONS AND PRIVATE GATHERINGS AT HOME

- Any associated activities that may pose a risk or potential for cluster exposure should be delayed (e.g. medium to large size gatherings). Safely celebrate in your household bubble. This protects the community and public from any exposure.
- Careful planning for graduation receptions is strongly advised to prevent any cluster outbreaks.* Celebrate with drive-thru food and refreshment pick-ups.
- Strictly follow the 15-person limitation for all private gatherings and if weather permits, gather outdoors.
- Carefully maintain distancing, wear a mask and only eat while outdoors.
- Protect those most vulnerable or at high risk from COVID related consequences.

Encourage graduates and friends to celebrate responsibly and to be safe as they celebrate their achievement and milestone of completing their graduation or promotion.

For questions, please contact the Health Command Operations Center at (928) 871-7014.

DEFINITIONS

Outdoor: Includes sports field, park, or parking lot.

Virtual: Graduations held on a virtual platform like zoom, google meets, etc.

Drive-thru: Graduates and families remain in vehicle for ceremony; no exiting the vehicles allowed. These events can be done in school parking lots or stadium parking lots. Diplomas may be handed through window.

Parade: Procession of vehicle with graduates and families- no exiting vehicles allowed.

Live streaming: Facebook Live, YouTube, or another virtual platform.

Drive-in: Graduates and families remain in vehicle; only graduate allowed to exit to receive diploma/certificate; vehicles can park with a maximum of up to 50 vehicles. One student at the podium at a time; others must remain in their vehicle.

Family pods: Families that live in the same home may remain together, closer than 6 feet, within one single family “pod.” Separate “pods” must maintain 6 or more feet of distance from other family “pods.”

Fully vaccinated: Two weeks after completion of any COVID-19 vaccination (both doses of Pfizer, or Moderna vaccines, or single dose of Johnson and Johnson Janssen vaccine).

Graduation: Receiving or conferring a degree or diploma.

Promotion: Students moving from grade to the next, for example, 8th grade to 9th grade.