Guidance for MIT Event Planners + Organizers

Updated: Aug 10, 2021

Note that MIT's event policy and this guidance are subject to change if public health conditions change on campus or in surrounding communities, or if local, state, or federal guidance changes.

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1. THE BASICS

WHAT’S AN EVENT?
These guidelines apply to organized activities that involve advance planning, advertising and promotion, and/or invitations or ticketing. “Events” include but are not limited to: professional or social gatherings; conferences; performances and concerts; sporting events; large or multi-day meetings; tours, fairs, and open houses; workshops open to the public; and K-12 programs. MIT classes and class-related activities, laboratory work, and study groups are not “events.”

MIT EVENT POLICY (updated 8/2/2021)
Events are allowed and welcomed on and off campus.

Internal events for MIT departments, labs, centers, faculty, and student organizations may now be held on campus. Events organized by external groups are also permitted if, in keeping with MIT Policies and Procedures, they are sponsored by recognized student groups or faculty and staff with departmental approval.

Event attendees

- **Campus access**: Event attendees who are not in Covid Pass may access MIT’s campus by being escorted by a Covid Pass holder or by checking in at the event venue. Please see MIT’s visitor policy for more details.
- **Contact information**: Event organizers are required to collect contact information for all event attendees, including name and cell phone number or email address. Event organizers are responsible for obtaining contact information using their system of choice and retaining the information for 14 days after the event. This information is for contact tracing purposes only.

Please note that:

- Face coverings are required for all attendees of indoor events.
- A speaker may deliver his or her presentation without a face covering so long as the audience is masked; multiple speakers who sit together on stage must either maintain 6 feet of physical distance or wear face coverings.
- If food and drink are served at an event, the event space capacity should be reduced while event attendees actively eat and drink. When dining, hosts and attendees should limit group size, maintain extra distance between individuals, and limit the time spent eating.

Events must follow Institute rules and protocols related to face coverings, visitors, distancing/space capacity, and more. See the latest policies; additional guidance for event planners will be available soon.
Events must also follow **pre-Covid event requirements**, including any registration requirements. Events held in specific spaces (residence halls, CAC-managed, Samberg, etc.) or by certain groups (FSILGs, student organizations) may be subject to additional rules or requirements. Please check with the appropriate entity to determine what other rules may apply.

**MIT-sponsored off-campus events** should follow the local rules of the event venue and must collect and maintain contact information for attendees as described above.

**TYPES OF EVENTS ALLOWED**

**Q: What types of events are permitted?** Large lectures and panel discussions? Small group meetings held in DLC-managed conference rooms? Faculty-led conferences using multiple campus spaces? Concerts, including vocal performances? Receptions with passed hors d'oeuvres and open bar?

**A:** Nearly all types of events are permitted with the following caveats:

- Event organizers are required to collect contact information for all event attendees.
- When indoors, face coverings are required for all attendees and participants with very limited exceptions (for speakers and eating/drinking).
- More specific guidance on certain types of performances and attendee/participant dancing will be forthcoming soon.

2. **ATTENDEES + PARTICIPANTS**

**GENERAL**

**Q: Are events with external (non-MIT) participants or attendees permitted?**

**A:** Non-MIT guests are permitted and must follow MIT policies that are in place at the time of the event (for visitors, face coverings, etc.).

**Q: Is there any information that needs to be collected from (or provided to) attendees? Is there a blanket statement that should be included in the event registration that attendees agree to not attend if they are ill or symptomatic?**

**A:** Event organizers must collect contact information from all event attendees including name and cell phone/email address for contact tracing purposes. Event organizers and venue staff are responsible for ensuring that event attendees are informed of current MIT policies. At their discretion, event organizers may include language instructing invited or registered guests to stay home if they feel ill on the day of the event or may include a health attestation in the day-of attendee check-in/registration process.

*NOTE: An updated policy about non-MIT attendee vaccination (requirements and reporting) is pending and will be announced soon.*
FACE COVERINGS
Q: Do all event attendees have to be masked? Does the type or size of the space matter (e.g., a large lecture hall versus small conference room)?
A: Yes, everyone must be masked when indoors, with limited exceptions for speakers when everyone else is fully masked and while actively eating and drinking. The type, size, and typical use of the room do not matter.

If the event is outdoors, masks are not required for vaccinated individuals; unvaccinated individuals should remain masked if they cannot maintain at least three (3) feet of distance from others.

Q: Is a group required to have masks available for people who forget?
A: While it is not required, it is a good idea to have extra masks available for attendees who need one.

HEALTH ATTESTATION
Q: Do event attendees need to attest?
A: Health attestation is not required for event attendees but may be included at the discretion of the event organizers.

VACCINATION
Q: Do event attendees need to be vaccinated? Should or can organizers require vaccination or verify vaccination status?
A: TBD. An updated policy about non-MIT attendee vaccination (requirements and reporting) is pending and will be announced soon.

CONTACT INFORMATION + CONTACT TRACING
Q: What information should event organizers collect from attendees and participants?
A: Event organizers are required to collect contact information for all event attendees, to be used for contact tracing purposes only. This includes name and cell phone number or email address. Event organizers are responsible for obtaining this information using their system of choice (e.g., Google form, Excel spreadsheet, paper sign-in sheet, etc.). Attendee contact information should be collected for both indoor and outdoor events.

Q: Do organizers turn in their contact tracing information after an event? If so, to whom? If not, how long are they supposed to keep the information—and where? For sponsored outside events, is the group required to provide this information to MIT in advance or just have it available if there is a need to contact trace?
A: Regardless of the type, location, or sponsor of the event, organizers do not have to turn in their attendee contact list to anyone (unless there is a positive case of Covid-19), but must retain the information for 14 days after the event.
It's a good idea to designate a specific departmental staff member (or two) who will have access to all event attendance lists/contact information to serve as the point(s) of contact for MIT Medical in the event of a positive case. Sharing of best practices and tools (not data) among MIT event organizers is also encouraged (e.g., via the Slack channel).

Q: What happens when a person tests positive for Covid after attending an MIT event? For example, how are other guests notified? Who notifies them? Do the procedures differ depending on whether the positive case is an MIT or external person?
A: Contact tracing is handled by MIT Medical. If a positive case is identified through weekly MIT testing, MIT Medical will contact the positive individual directly. If that individual reports attending an MIT event, MIT Medical personnel may contact the event sponsor to get the attendee contact list. MIT Medical will reach out to any known close contacts and coordinate with the Cambridge Department of Public Health (DPH) and other public agencies as needed.

If a non-MIT attendee tests positive and contacts the event organizer to let them know, the event organizer should email the information to MIT Medical’s contact tracing team at covidteam@med.mit.edu as soon as possible.

For larger events where there may be uncertainty as to who is a close contact, MIT Medical will work with Cambridge DPH to determine whether or not notification of possible exposure should be made to all event participants and proceed accordingly.

Other than contacting MIT Medical (covidteam@med.mit.edu) and providing event attendee contact lists if requested, event organizers do not need to (and should not) take any action (such as notifying attendees directly).

3. CAMPUS ACCESS FOR ATTENDEES + VENDORS

GENERAL ACCESS
Q: How will event attendees who are not in Covid Pass get inside locked MIT buildings to attend an event?
A: Visitors may access MIT’s campus in the following ways:

- **Covid Pass holder escort**: Visitors may enter non-residential campus buildings from any access point if accompanied by a Covid Pass user; such visitors should be accompanied by a Covid Pass user while inside campus buildings. Covid Pass users may host a reasonable number of visitors at one time (e.g., the number of people that they can practically escort during a single visit) and are responsible for their guest(s) for the duration of the visit.

- **Event or tour attendance**: Visitors attending an MIT event or joining a campus tour should check in upon arrival at the event venue or location (e.g., check-in tables at entrance to Kresge).
- **Tim Tickets**: MIT Covid Pass users can grant temporary campus access to invited guests via Tim Tickets (MIT’s visitor pass system). Tim Tickets will be available later in August, and more information is [below](#).

Q: For events on the upper floors of a secure building (such as E14/Media Lab or E52/Samberg), do we need to have an MIT staff member on the ground level to make sure attendees push the correct elevator button?
A: No, staff do not need to guide attendees from the first-floor entrance or monitor the elevator operations. Directional event signage will suffice.

Q: How does an event attendee enter multiple buildings for an event that is being held in multiple locations across multiple days? For example, the plenary session in Kresge, breakouts in the Student Center and classrooms, and lunch at Samberg or Walker.
A: [Tim Tickets](#) is the best solution for this situation as it grants visitors access to most parts of the campus (except for normally restricted areas like the nuclear reactor and other off-limits facilities). Otherwise, the attendee would require a Covid Pass holder escort to get into and move through different campus buildings, which is less practical and convenient.

Q: What about outdoor events?
A: Unescorted visitors continue to be allowed in outdoor and public spaces (1st floor of W20, Stata Student Street) on campus. Event organizers who are hosting outdoor events must collect contact information for all attendees (which could be challenging depending on the nature of the event and outdoor space).

**TIM TICKETS**

Q: How will the Tim Tickets system work?
A: The [Tim Tickets system](#) is not yet deployed, but when it’s implemented, it will allow MIT Covid Pass holders to issue short-term unescorted access privileges in circulation spaces during designated hours to authorized visitors. Guests or visitors with an active Tim Ticket can tap into any campus entry point with a QR code reader using the Tim Tickets app on their cell phone. A pilot is live now before campus-wide deployment for employees in mid-August, followed by deployment to MIT Housing residents (for residence halls). Requirements for Tim Tickets users are to acknowledge and agree to follow campus policies; share contact information; and attest to vaccination status.

Q: Can we use Tim Tickets to register event attendees?
A: Tim Tickets is a campus access tool for visitors and is not designed for use as an event registration tool.

Q: Who needs a Tim Ticket? Temps? All event attendees? Delivery people? Must those who make food deliveries be registered in Tim Tickets?
A: With a few exceptions (buildings that will be open to the general public), campus visitors inside MIT buildings must either have an active Tim Ticket, be escorted by someone who is in COVID Pass, or be inside the event venue while attending an event (e.g., someone attending a concert in Kresge would not require a Covid Pass holder escort or a Tim Ticket while in Kresge during the performance).

VENDOR ACCESS
Q: What is the best way to manage access for event support staff from outside vendors (e.g., catering, specialty furniture, lighting companies)? For a large event, there could be multiple vendors with multiple staff who need access during the set-up and break-down processes and the event itself. Do these people need to be entered into Covid Pass? How do we manage the last-minute changes that regularly happen with these types of vendors?
A: Tim Tickets is the best solution for vendor staff who only need one-time or infrequent campus access.

4. SPEAKERS + PERFORMERS
FACE COVERINGS
Q: Does a speaker in a lecture hall have to wear a mask? Does the distance from the audience matter? What if the speaker is not from MIT (e.g., guest lecturer from another institution)?
A: The speaker, including non-MIT community members, does not have to wear a mask as long as the audience is masked. The rule of thumb indoors is, in a given space, only one mask should be down or off at a time.

If the event is outdoors, masks are not required for vaccinated individuals; all unvaccinated individuals should remain masked outdoors if they cannot maintain at least 3 feet of distance from others.

VACCINATION
Q: Should we obtain a speaker’s vaccination status? Should we require vaccination for speakers or performers?
A: TBD. An updated policy about non-MIT event attendee vaccination (requirements and reporting), including invited/non-MIT speakers and performers, is pending and will be announced soon.

PANELS
Q: Are panel discussions permitted? Do panelists need to be masked? Often, there is insufficient space to have more than a couple of people 6 feet apart on a stage.
A: Yes, panel discussions are permitted. Multiple speakers or performers who are together on stage must either:
• wear face coverings when another person is speaking (i.e., pull it down while speaking and then back up while listening to another panelist, the moderator, or the audience) or
• maintain 6 feet of physical distance if unmasked at the same time.

This distance is advised because panels typically have people seated next to one another for a considerable time period (e.g., more than 15 minutes and while turning toward each other to debate an idea animatedly).

PERFORMANCES
Q: Will performances, rehearsals, and practices be permitted? For example, will a capella or dance groups be allowed to perform at events? Are there distancing or other requirements to do so?
A: Indoor performances that involve groups singing, speaking theatrically, or other vocal projections, or playing woodwind or brass instruments should be avoided due to the indoor face mask requirement. Other types of performances—e.g., dance, string instruments— that allow performers and audience to remain masked are allowed.

We understand it’s not always as simple as swapping out an a capella performance for an acoustic guitar set—there are classes, extracurricular activities, student organizations, and regular events that are devoted solely to music, theater arts, debate, and more. Events and performances where these are the main feature of the event (i.e., wind ensemble concert; a play) will be discussed later in August with the subset of MIT groups that organize and host such events, with further clarity to come.

DANCING
Q: Some student groups host events/rehearsals with visitors (not in Covid Pass) who may or may not be vaccinated. Is dancing in close proximity (think tango, not line dancing) allowed? Should we limit dances to the MIT community only?
A: More specific guidance on dances and club activities (tango, ballroom, swing, etc.) will be coming soon.

5. SPACES + FACILITIES
INDOORS/OUTDOORS
Q: Are indoor events permitted?
A: Yes, indoor events are now permitted, although outdoor events are encouraged whenever possible. Event planners should consider whether portions of the event, especially meals and snacks, can take place outdoors.
Q: Will MIT be erecting semi-permanent tent spaces or canopies to offer sheltered/covered spaces for outdoor events and/or day-to-day outdoor dining in inclement weather? If so, how can these be reserved?
A: MIT is aware of the heightened demand for outdoor spaces and is currently exploring options for canopies at specific outdoor locations. Please note, however, that MIT is not arranging tent installations for DLC-sponsored events. More information to come.

Q: Is the use of a tent always understood as “outdoors”?
A: It depends. If all sides are open or only one side-wall lowered, it can be considered outdoors. If a tent has two or more side-walls down, it should be treated the same as indoors.

CAPACITY LIMITS + SOCIAL DISTANCING
Q: What capacity limits or social distancing requirements apply?
A: There are no capacity or distancing limits for events at this time except:
- When individuals are eating and drinking indoors, table capacities should be reduced to 75% and 6 feet of distance between tables is recommended.
- When multiple panelists or performers are sharing a stage, they should either maintain 6 feet of physical distance or wear masks when not speaking (and avoid speaking unmasked at the same time as others who are unmasked).
- When outdoors, unvaccinated individuals who cannot maintain 3 feet of physical distance from others must wear a mask.

Q: Are there limitations to restroom capacity at events?
A: No.

CLEANING PROTOCOLS
Q: Are enhanced cleaning protocols required? If so, what are they?
A: There are no enhanced cleaning protocols required, unless a positive case has been identified. Special cleaning may be performed in spaces where there has been a positive case in the past 72 hours. As part of the contact tracing and notification process, MIT Medical will notify EHS and Facilities, who will determine whether enhanced cleaning (performed by an external vendor) is required.

Q: Is a group required to provide hand sanitizer beyond stations that MIT has in place?
A: Event organizers are encouraged to provide additional hand sanitizer stations for guests if existing MIT stations are not easily accessible to guests and attendees.

Q: Should multiple people touch an object such as a serving utensil, pen, lectern, folder, gift, or microphone? Is there a guiding principle for objects related to events/gatherings at this time?
A: COVID is not generally transmitted on surfaces, so multiple people touching objects is not a problem. However, we recommend that event organizers make hand sanitizer available to attendees as a good practice.
Q: Are there any rules or restrictions on table linens? Are linens ok/sanitary to use at this time? Must linen be changed if more than one group of people will use a table?
A: Table linens are allowed with no restrictions. An event organizer may request more frequent linen changes, but it is not required.

OTHER
Q: Are there plans to centralize the rules for specific spaces (residence halls, CAC-managed, Samberg, etc.) or by certain groups (FSILGs, student organizations)?
A: No, not at this time. Please contact the manager or the specific event space for more detailed information and guidance.

6. FOOD + DRINK
In addition to all standard food safety practices, the following guidelines will enable safer communal eating and dining with a simple, consistently applied approach to indoor and outdoor gatherings across campus.

The overarching goal is to manage the risks associated with people lowering or removing their masks while eating and drinking by encouraging outdoor meals whenever possible and maintaining extra distance and limiting dining time when indoors.

This guidance applies to the following locations, including but not limited to:
● Dining halls and social events in MIT Housing and FSILGs;
● Retail cafés w/ seating and dining rooms/spaces (e.g., Forbes Family Cafe, 100 Main Marketplace, W20 eateries and dining rooms);
● Casual eating in DLC-controlled spaces (e.g., conference rooms, break rooms and kitchens);
● Events on campus (e.g., Samberg Conference Center, Media Lab) and other MIT venues (Endicott House); and
● Academic and research buildings with event space.

GENERAL GUIDANCE
● Dining outdoors is strongly encouraged whenever possible.
● When dining indoors, event organizers are strongly encouraged to create extra distance between attendees by strategically selecting and arranging furniture to:
  ○ Reduce the normal capacity of tables used for dining by roughly 75% (e.g., seating 3 people at a table that typically seats 4) and
  ○ Leave extra distance between tables (6 feet from table edge to table edge).
● There are no space capacity limits other than those mentioned above related to table capacity and distance between tables.
• Limit the duration of meal or snack times as a precautionary measure; attendees should wear face coverings when not actively eating or drinking.

• All serving methods and food types are allowed (e.g., attendees may be provided with individual, pre-packaged meals; people may serve themselves from a buffet station; staff may serve from a buffet station; or staff may serve a plated meal to seated diners). Pre-packaged or boxed items are not necessary. Face coverings must remain on both diners and servers during self-service or staff-service periods.

• When dining indoors, we strongly encourage diners to be seated or, if standing, stationary (e.g., standing at a hi-top table), when consuming food or drinks.
  ○ Organizers should encourage stationary eating and drinking with plentiful seating and table options and event signage or announcements.
  ○ Thoughtful furniture selection and arrangement may be used to help avoid excessive clustering of guests. For example, placement of hi-top tables for no more than 3 people will prompt guests to disperse throughout a space.
  ○ Signage can be used to remind attendees to wear face coverings when not eating or drinking and to avoid clustering. Signs can also be placed on each table to indicate maximum capacity.

• Events serving alcoholic beverages must comply with Institute policy.

FOOD SERVICE + CATERING

Q: How should food and drinks be served? What type of catering is allowed?
All of the following types of service and styles of events are allowed with some caveats and cautions. In all instances, masks should remain on except while actively eating or drinking.

✔ Individually wrapped portions or “grab-and-go” meals. Allowed but not required.

✔ Coffee station? Water/drink dispensers? Self-service beverage stations are permitted.

✔ Buffet-style staffed by a caterer? Allowed. Face coverings must remain on attendees and staff while in the serving line. We recommend hand sanitizer be available at the front of all serving lines.

✔ Self-service buffet line with uncovered dishes? Allowed. Diners should all be masked while in line. Attention should be given to ensure that the food is easy/quick to serve oneself, so that the lines can keep moving. We recommend hand sanitizer be available at the front of all serving lines.

✔ Served plated meals at a sit-down dinner? Allowed. Diners and servers should be masked during service.

✔ Cocktail reception? Allowed, but large clusters of attendees and people eating/drinking while moving around the space should be discouraged.
Passed hors d'oeuvres (served to seated or standing attendees efficiently and quickly)? Allowed with the caveat that attendees are strongly encouraged to remain stationary while eating or drinking.

Q: Can attendees use their own cups, plates, or utensils at events/gatherings if there are buffets and shared serving vessels? Many people carry these reusable items.  
A: Use of reusable items should not be permitted at events. This is from a food safety perspective and is frowned upon by the health department.

Q: Is plexiglass required on buffet tables or in front of service areas (beverage station, bar, etc.)?  
A: No. But everyone should be masked while moving through a buffet line.

Q: Do food service rules or recommendations change depending on whether the event is indoors or outdoors?  
A: Yes. The need to preserve extra distance between diners and tables is greater indoors than outdoors. Masks are not required outdoors for vaccinated individuals. (Note that enclosed tents– with two or more side walls down– should be considered “indoors.”)

Q: Can event planners hire food trucks for outdoor events?  
A: Yes, as long as they are approved by the City of Cambridge. Event planners are encouraged to ask about the vendor’s COVID practices when inquiring about an event.

Q: If there is leftover food after an event, can we leave it in common areas for students to pick up?  
A: No. This practice is strongly discouraged from a food safety perspective. Please dispose of surplus food in other ways and do not send a message to Free Food @ MIT or leave trays of food in hallways or other spaces.

DRINKS (INCLUDING ALCOHOL)
Q: Is it permitted to provide bottled water for guests? Can attendees take a sip of water during an event presentation, performance, or discussion when another attendee has removed their mask to speak?  
A: Yes, but attendees should minimize the time unmasked (e.g., lower mask briefly to take a sip and then raise mask to cover nose and mouth).

Q: What is the guidance for alcohol at receptions and dinners?  
A: Attendees are encouraged to wear their face coverings when not actively drinking (e.g., lower mask briefly to take a sip and then raise mask to cover nose and mouth) and should remain stationary while drinking and avoid large, close clusters of people. Otherwise, all normal rules regarding alcohol at MIT events apply.
7. OFF-CAMPUS EVENTS

GENERAL
Q: Are off-campus events allowed? What rules or guidelines apply to off-campus events? What if the rules of the event venue are more permissive than those for MIT’s campus venues?
A: Yes, off-campus events are allowed, including those with food. Event organizers are required to collect attendee information as described above (name, email and/or cell phone) for contact tracing purposes. Events should follow the guidelines of the off-campus event venue, and we strongly encourage that MIT’s rules for on-campus events and spaces also be observed (e.g., wearing face coverings when not actively eating and drinking, eating outdoors whenever possible, keeping groups small and leaving extra distance, and limiting the time spent dining).

Q: If an event is off-campus, is there a limit to the size of the group (must it be 6 people or fewer)? Must it be all MIT people in Covid Pass? Does it matter if people are eating?
A: There is not a size limit for off-campus events, although if food or drink will be served, we strongly recommend that organizers follow MIT guidance on eating and drinking, in addition to the venue rules. The attendees do not have to all be in COVID Pass.

REGISTRATION
Q: Do we have to register off-campus events? I understand that if it’s an MIT event we will need to keep a guest list and contact tracing information, but do we have to register it?
A: DLCs should register all online and in-person events, including off-campus events, with the Institute Events Office if they meet any of the following conditions:
  ● alcohol will be served;
  ● you are expecting more than 100 participants;
  ● more than 20% of participants are not members of the MIT community;
  ● events are cosponsored with a non-MIT partner;
  ● minors will participate; or
  ● money will be exchanged.

Depending on the nature of the event, registration with other campus entities may also be required (e.g., programs involving minors, student organizations, etc.).

8. COMPLIANCE
Q: Who is responsible for enforcing these guidelines at events, whether on- or off-campus?
A: Event organizers and venue staff are responsible for:
  ● ensuring that event attendees are informed of current MIT policies;
  ● enforcing these guidelines; and
  ● their guests’ behavior while attending events at MIT.
Please note that MIT Police do not enforce Covid policies and should only be called when there is a real emergency or concern for the safety of attendees (e.g., highly disruptive or dangerous behavior from a guest).

Q: Any tips to help event organizers manage attendee behavior? It’s hard enough to get people to RSVP! If an attendee is not complying with MIT policy, what can event organizers do?
A: There are a few strategies and suggestions to encourage attendee compliance with MIT policies.

- First, educate and inform attendees of the rules early and often—on the save-the-date, on the invitation, reiterated when they check-in, posted on signage.
- Second, design your event with compliance in mind. Make it as easy as possible for your attendees to comply. This might include clear and ubiquitous signage (to make sure people know and understand the rules); having extra masks available for attendees who need one; or eliminating or modifying the elements of your event that you expect to be problematic (takeaway boxed meals, no open bar).
- If attendees refuse to comply, event organizers have the right to ask the attendee to leave the event. If after being asked to leave, an attendee becomes disruptive and is threatening the safety of staff and/or other attendees, you should call MIT campus police to remove the attendee.

9. MORE QUESTIONS?
If you have a question that is not addressed above, please email covidevents@mit.edu.

The MIT Event Planners Slack workspace (mit-event-planners.slack.com) is also an excellent community resource for best practices, recommendations, and more.