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<https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2020/06/16/polis-special-events-guidelines-weddings-venues.html>

Colorado's events sector finally got reopening guidelines. Here's what they look like so far.

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Colorado venues can start hosting special events as soon as possibly this weekend — though they'll be able to do so at capacities of no more than 100 people indoors, and with attendees being forced to refrain from mingling with those outside their household as much as possible.

Gov. Jared Polis released draft guidance on the reopening of such events Monday, following several weeks of intense calls from hotels and event planners who had warned that failing to do so would lead to layoffs and business closings in numbers even greater than the state has seen. Polis also said during a media briefing that he soon will move some counties from the "Safer at Home" phase of coronavirus restrictions to a new "Protect Our Neighbors" phase in which they could allow activities of as many as 500 participants if they meet certain guidelines.

Even with the allowance, events from trade shows to weddings to concerts are going to look very different. Buffets and self-service food stations will be banned indoors (but not outdoors). Single-direction traffic flow must be established into seating areas. Plexiglass barriers will go up at appropriate places.

But after three months in which hotel ballrooms have languished without guests, event halls have gone quiet and wedding planners have watched every 2020 event drop off their calendar, the guidelines represent a big step forward for venue operators. Members of the public have until 5 p.m. Wednesday to comment on them, with Polis likely to finalize rules Thursday.

"We appreciate Governor Polis' announcement that meetings and events can slowly restart during the next phase of his public-health orders. However, there is much more work ahead to rebuild this critical part of Colorado's economy and to bring back to work the tens of thousands of our employees statewide," said [Amie Mayhew](#), president/CEO of the Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association, in an email to Denver Business Journal.

"Without that commitment, we are truly concerned about the economic devastation to our employees, suppliers and communities," Mayhew continued. "We are prepared to demonstrate to Governor Polis, and all Coloradans, that we can host meetings and events in a safe manner, utilizing proper social distancing and cleaning, to ensure the health of our guests and employees."

Polis announced the draft guidelines Monday at the same time he announced the easing of several other restrictions following a 14-day period in which Colorado has seen declining numbers of new coronavirus cases during 12 of those days. Bars now will be able to seat 25 people indoors or 50 people outdoors, manufacturing facilities can begin to open at greater than 50% capacity and overnight summer camps will be allowed to welcome campers this summer, the Democratic governor said.

The biggest economic news of the day, however, was the allowance of events, without which two industries have been crippled for months. Hotels — some of which rely on events to fill the majority of their guest rooms — have furloughed roughly 70,000 workers in Colorado. And event businesses, which employ 36,000 people and generate a \$1 billion economic impact statewide, have been almost completely shuttered for now, with 45% reporting in a survey that they expected to close permanently if nothing were to change by the end of July.



KATHLEEN LAVINE | DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Events such as this Denver Business Journal Outstanding Women in Business reception at RedLine may look different in the future.

Putting out guidelines allowing for events is very different than [Polis' May 25 announcement](#) that restaurants could reopen their dining rooms just two days later.

Whereas people began heading back to eateries right away, most events are booked months or years (in the case of trade shows) in advance, and the near future likely remains quiet for venues unless they've had patient meeting planners hold against cancelling gatherings so far. And the first wave of events at least will be smaller and more sterile than gatherings were in February, before coronavirus struck Colorado.

Indoor venues of 5,650 square feet or less can have a maximum of 50 people, which expands to a cap of 75 folks up to 11,300 square feet and 100 attendees for spaces over that. While the numbers provide for 113 square feet of space per person, they still represent largely empty spaces for some facilities; the largest meeting area in the [Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center](#) in Aurora, for example, is 60,000 square feet.

Facilities hitting capacity for receptions, indoor markets or theater shows must set up lines and operate on a one-in-one-out basis, with signage reminding everyone to wear masks and stay six feet away from others. Performers and employees must have symptoms checked. Touchless hand-sanitizing stations must go up at entrances and at high-traffic areas.

Outdoor events — including receptions, fairs, rodeos and concerts — can greet slightly larger crowds of as many as 50, 125 or 175 people for the three defined tiers of space. Most of the same restrictions as indoors apply, including the refraining from mingling with people not in attendees' households, though events like fairs that separate people into different venues or arenas can allow crowds up to the maximum temporary capacity for each of those venues.

Per an existing public health order, there will continue to be no attendees allowed at professional sporting events or at car, motorcycle or horse races.

The biggest changes may come next, when Polis said he could begin allowing counties with low rates of virus transmission, high capacity to treat victims and significant contact-tracing infrastructure to permit all activities at 50% capacity with as many as 500 people. He expects the state will have the guidelines for that phase ready to be released at the end of this month and enacted for the first sets of counties in July.

"Now, to be clear, there is a risk in all activities. And some Coloradans may choose not to engage in these activities," Polis said during his media briefing. "But for those who chose to engage even with these risks, we want to make sure they can do this more safely."

[Brynn Swanson](#), owner of the First Look Events wedding-planning company in Denver and a leader with the Colorado Events Alliance, said that sector leaders will ask for some tweaks, such as an easing of the proposed requirement that guests wear masks throughout entire events. But she said that, in general, people are excited to be able to gather and celebrate again.

"The events industry as a whole is thrilled to finally be recognized as an important industry, which, on the whole, has been left behind in the reopening process," said Swanson, who had voiced consternation with how long it took the state to respond to [proposed guidelines that industry officials had submitted](#) last month. "The key to the whole industry is making sure we do this safely, so we don't have to go back to square one when there is an uptick in numbers."

The reopening of Colorado's economy comes as neighboring states like Arizona and Utah report spikes in cases — numbers Polis has said worry him. But he said the difference in Colorado seems to be people's willingness to do things like wear masks and stay distanced from others, and he said that's the reason he feels comfortable moving ahead with these changes.

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