COVID-19 Transitioning - Standards and Guidance for Wedding Receptions

Version 2.0
Effective from 7th June 2021

The following standards for weddings receptions are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and the Organised Mass Events Regulations, 2021 and all their subsequent amendments. Only seated wedding receptions are permitted, and no stand-up receptions are currently permitted.

Standards to be observed in wedding receptions

The Superintendent of Public Health hereby orders that the following standards be implemented in wedding receptions:

- exercise the right of refusal of entry into the wedding reception venue of staff and attendees who are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms;
- ensure that at entry or exit and in restrooms, every person keeps a minimum of 2 metres from others;
- provide appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub stations at the entrance of the venue and of restrooms;
- the number of attendees for wedding receptions shall not exceed one (1) person per four (4) square metres of the space where the wedding reception is to be organised as long as the number of attendees shall not exceed one hundred (100) persons for indoor venues and three hundred (300) persons for outdoor venues.
- the couple shall notify the Malta Tourism Authority of date and time, venue, number of attendees, and caterer details for their wedding reception at least three (3) weeks in advance using the prescribed form on the MTA website1;
- all attendees shall be seated at tables with a maximum of six (6) persons per table, except when the persons on the table are from the same household;
- a two (2) metres distance shall be retained between one table and another;
- the use of dance floors shall be prohibited, except for one dance by the couple alone and a second dance exclusively reserved for the couple together with their parents;
- all standing up shall be prohibited except upon entering and exiting the venue, whilst being served at buffet tables and in order to go to restrooms;
- masks shall be worn by all attendees except when seated at tables;

1 THIS APPLIES FOR WEDDING RECEPTIONS FROM MONDAY 5TH JULY 2021 ONWARDS.
• masks shall be worn by all staff throughout the wedding reception;
• all drink shall be served only to attendees sitting at tables and there shall be no services from bars;
• all food shall be consumed sitting at tables and may be served to attendees sitting at tables and from buffet tables, as detailed below;
• keep records of name, surname, and phone contact details of attendees including seating arrangements and contact numbers and these details should be kept for at least 4 weeks and be available to the health authorities for contact tracing purposes, if necessary;
• singers, musicians and disk jockeys should maintain a distance of at least four (4) metres from patrons due to the generation and emission of respiratory droplets of various sizes that occurs during singing. When such distance cannot be maintained acrylic or tempered glass barriers must be fitted around the singer/musician/DJ stand (2 metres from the floor);
• singers shall adhere to the Standards for choirs² issued by the Public Health authorities;
• musicians and disk jockeys shall adhere to the Standards for musicians and orchestras³ issued by the Public Health authorities and shall wear a mask at all times;
• musicians, singers, diskjockeys and any other source of sound in a wedding reception shall provide ONLY low volume music or background music to attendees. The sound level shall not exceed an average of 70dB(A) from the table nearest to the source. (70dB(A) means that it is possible to conduct a conversation with a person next to you without raising your voice). No stroboscopic light, dense lights or any other moving light structures are permitted. Smoke machines, Low Fog machines, fans, misters or any dispersion units are prohibited both indoors & outdoors.
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How COVID-19 spreads
The virus which causes COVID-19 disease can be spread through droplets from a sick person or on contact (by touch). COVID-19 disease often presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and

objects - such as desks, tables, machinery, equipment, floors, walls, clothes or telephones. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Being less than two metres away from a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time, one can catch the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them.

In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. The most common symptoms of coronavirus include cough, fever, shortness of breath, tiredness, sore throat, runny / blocked nose, headache, muscle pain, loss of smell, loss of taste, diarrhoea or vomiting. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness. Persons who develop any of these symptoms, even if mild, are to stay at home, contact their doctor and contact the Public Health team on (+356) 111 for further advice and guidance. For more information, seek guidance on www.covid19health.gov.mt

**Guidance on the use of medical or cloth masks or visors**

Legal Notice 402 of 2020 prescribes that persons shall wear a mask or visor in a proper manner covering the nose, mouth and chin of the person outside their residence, both when going to an indoor place and outdoors. The mandatory use of medical or cloth masks or visors also applies to retail outlets and lotto booths.

All staff and attendees at wedding receptions shall use medical or cloth masks or visors at all times. Where tolerated, masks (or masks together with visors) are preferred to visors alone. Masks or visors are to be invariably worn on entering or exiting reception venues and all common areas including restrooms and can only be removed when seated at table.

**COVID Alert Malta**

All staff and attendees are encouraged to download the COVID Alert Malta application to help facilitate the contact tracing process in case they develop COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone known to have COVID-19. The instructions for downloading the application can be found at https://covidalert.gov.mt

**COVID Vaccination**

All staff and attendees are encouraged to register online for vaccination via the link at MALTA – COVID-19 VACCINATION (gov.mt), according to the current age-groups / cohorts being invited.
Determining the venue capacity for wedding receptions

No standing up is allowed during wedding receptions. Wedding reception organisers shall ensure that in the area/venue where the reception is being held, the number of attendees is not more than 1 person per 4 square metres of available space where the wedding reception is to be organised as long as the number of attendees shall not exceed one hundred (100) persons for indoor venues and three hundred (300) persons for outdoor venues.

To achieve this 4 square metre ‘rule’:

i. calculate the area of the venue/space being used (e.g. length of venue in metres × width of venue in metres = area of premises in square metres)

ii. divide the area of the premises by 4

iii. the answer of that division (ignoring any remainder) is the maximum capacity that the venue can hold at any one time.

By way of example of calculation for an outdoor venue (capped at a maximum of 300 persons), if the outdoor venue/space is 1162 square metres in size, 1162 ÷ 4 = 290.5, ignoring the remainder of 0.5, the organiser should allow only 290 attendees at any time in the area/venue. For larger venues the value of the areas of separate sections of the venue should be summed up to calculate the total area, but the total number of attendees shall nonetheless not exceed 300 persons.

A similar calculation should be done for indoor venues (capped at a maximum of 100 persons), only usable areas of the venue/area that can be accessed by attendees should be included when calculating venue/area capacity. Areas pertaining to sections of the premises such as storage areas, staff-only areas and backstage areas (where applicable) should not be included.

Physical (social) distancing

Social distancing refers to the requirement that people physically distance themselves from others. All attendees shall be seated throughout the wedding reception. Attendees must keep at least 2 metres from others and with the exception of families with children or people from the same household, no more than six (6) persons should be allowed to sit together in a group at table. Wedding reception organisers need to adapt their event and the venue being utilised to allow for appropriate physical distancing, avoid crowding and ensure that each group of attendees maintains physical distancing of at least 2m from other groups while seated at table.

Organisers should also review tasks and processes that usually require close physical interaction and identify ways to modify these to increase physical distancing between staff members and between staff and attendees.
Standards applicable to staff at wedding receptions
Working in close contact increases the risk of staff being exposed to COVID-19. Wedding reception organisers should undertake a risk assessment to determine what control standards are reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimise health and safety risks from COVID-19 to their staff. For example, if close contact with others is unavoidable, the following standards can apply:

- minimising the number of people within an area at any time
- staggering start, finish and break times where appropriate
- moving work tasks to different areas of the venue/event area or off-site if possible
- if possible, it is recommended that staff are divided in set work teams, following a fixed bubbles concept.
- ensuring each staff member has their own equipment or tools where possible
- ensuring staff do not attend the event if they are experiencing potential symptoms of COVID-19

Personal protective equipment for staff
Staff should wear a mask or visor at all times unless exempted (refer to L.N. 402 of 2020 for further information regarding exemptions). Organisers must also provide appropriate training and instruction on how to put on and fit, wear, remove and dispose of masks and on how to put on, remove and sanitise visors. They must also provide suitable facilities to dispose of masks appropriately. Information about using masks or visors is provided by the manufacturer.

The use of additional personal protective equipment (PPE) is recommended when staff, despite other control standards, require to be in close contact with each other or with other people for longer than the recommended time (i.e. more than 15 minutes face-to-face cumulative over one day or more than 2 hours in a shared closed space). Staff must be trained in the proper use of PPE. Be aware of risks that may arise as a result of staff using and wearing PPE inappropriately.

Gloves will not normally be necessary for most tasks, apart from staff handling food and beverages (see below), handling/disposing of garbage and for cleaning (see below). If organisers choose to supply or use gloves, they should make sure the gloves are suitable for the intended tasks.

Personal protective equipment for attendees
In line with LN 402 of 2020, attendees are required to wear a medical or cloth mask or visor in a proper manner covering the nose, mouth and chin of the person at all times throughout the wedding reception unless seated at table or exemptions listed in the same legal notice apply. Where tolerated, masks (or masks together with visors) are preferred to visors alone. Additionally, attendees should be made aware of increased risks when event participants are likely to raise their voice (e.g. shouting, chanting or singing).
Hygiene facilities and ventilation

Organisers must ensure there are adequate and accessible facilities to achieve good hygiene and that facilities are equipped with disposable hand wipes, soap and sanitizers, are in good working order, clean and safe. The venue should be thoroughly cleaned several times each day (see further details in section on ‘Cleaning and Disinfection’ below). Open receptacles should be made available for disposal of waste.

Bathroom doors and windows should be kept open to allow for better ventilation. Hand dryers should not be used as these can potentially disperse viral particles into the air. If portable toilets are being provided, also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked throughout the duration of the event. Hand sanitiser stations should also be provided and where possible these should be touch-free.

In the case of indoor venues, conditions and guidance on air-conditioning and ventilation systems⁴ are to be followed. Action required depends on the type of air-conditioning and ventilation systems operating at the venue. Air-conditioning filters should be checked prior to the event and cleaned regularly and as necessary. Proper replacement rate of indoor air should be ascertained. In indoor venues, doors and windows must be kept open to improve ventilation.

The number of people who can use the restroom at any one time should be managed to ensure physical distancing can be maintained in queues, and such as by scheduling longer and more frequent intermission times and by providing more sanitary facilities.

Serving of food and refreshments

All food and drink shall be consumed at tables. Furthermore,

- All drink shall be ordered and served to attendees sitting at tables only and there shall be no services from bars. Waiters will handle all glassware from the bottom part of the glassware.
- Food shall be served to attendees sitting at tables and / or from buffet tables. They shall be called table by table to the buffet.
- Guests shall be called table by table to the food buffet counter. At the buffet counter:
  - Full acrylic or tempered glass screen to be set up.
  - Chefs and serving staff shall serve and plate food to attendees at the food buffer counter, as requested by guests.
  - Guests cannot serve themselves from the buffet items.
  - All food at the buffet counter shall be covered at all times when served in chafing dishes and all other food shall be protected by sneeze guards.
  - Serving utensils will only be handled by the serving staff at the counter.
  - If a guest wishes to be served hot and larder items, two separate plates shall be used.

- Serving staff shall never touch a plate once this has been handed over to the guest.
- Guests shall be permitted to handle only plate ware or cutlery for their own use, i.e., for the serving of food which is to be consumed by themselves.
- No re-filling of same plate shall be carried out. Guests shall be provided with a clean plate for each order.

- No communal food and beverage service or self-service items are allowed.
- Attendees are not to be allowed to serve themselves or help themselves to items such as straws, stirrers or condiments from a container that can be touched by all attendees. Instead they should have such items handed to them by staff.
- Shared finger foods are not allowed - each attendee shall be provided with their own separate portion.
- Any staff handling food/beverage items should adhere to strict hygiene principles. These include masks or visors at all times, frequent hand washing and use of gloves when handling such items, or, where possible, use of an implement (such as tongs) to eliminate direct contact with the items being served to attendees. Any staff required to use gloves is advised to consult the advice on handwashing and the use of gloves published by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate to ensure that gloves are used in an appropriate and hygienic manner.
- Bins should be available for attendees to be able to safely dispose of any waste.

**Deliveries, contractors and transport**
Minimise the number of staff attending to deliveries as much as possible. Delivery drivers and other contractors who need to provide essential activities, should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are on site. Ensure hand washing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is readily available for workers/volunteers after handling deliveries.

**Cleaning and disinfecting standards**
A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. There shall be ongoing cleaning and disinfection operations of all the areas of the venue accessible to attendees. The venue/area must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly before and after the wedding reception at a minimum. High-touch surfaces should be targeted for more frequent disinfection during the reception as described below.

Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient. Once clean, surfaces can be disinfected. When and how often the premises should be disinfected will depend on the likelihood of contamination. Alternatively, cleaners may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.

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How to clean and disinfect
Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively moving towards the dirtiest surface to avoid spreading dirt to cleaner surfaces. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets. Cleaning products should not be used near children. Staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent attendees or themselves from inhaling toxic vapours.

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing ≥ 70% alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer’s instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Areas to be cleaned and disinfected
Any surfaces that are frequently touched should be prioritised for cleaning, e.g. door handles, seating, counters, acrylic screens (if installed) and bathroom and other sanitary facilities, including bathroom fixtures like taps and flushing handles. Any surfaces that are visibly dirty, or have a spill, should be cleaned as soon as they are identified, regardless of when they were last cleaned.

Seating and other surfaces frequently touched by attendees should be disinfected before and after the reception. Seating surfaces should be wipeable and easy to clean, if seats have fabric coverings application of wipeable covers is required or alternatively a disposable or washable cover is to be applied and replaced after each use.

What should cleaners wear?
In most circumstances, it will not be necessary for cleaners to wear protective clothing to clean the premises. However, workers should use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is necessary for the products they are using. Gloves and a disposable apron are the minimum requirements. Medical masks should be used, in particular if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. Clothes that can be washed afterwards are suitable.

Protocols for isolating suspected cases
Wedding reception organisers should have protocols in place for actions to be taken in case an attendee or a member of staff develops coronavirus symptoms while on the premises, including appropriate cleaning and disinfection.

Persons who develop or are noted to have potential COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) should be isolated immediately. Individuals who feel unwell with such
symptoms should call 111. If you are calling an ambulance (112) or bringing someone who is severely ill to a hospital or other healthcare facility, call first to alert them that the person may have COVID-19.

Individuals who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms should similarly be isolated, sent home, and advised to call 111 and follow public health guidance for community-related exposure. If symptoms develop, individuals should follow public health guidance in this regard.

Organisers should establish procedures for safely transporting sick individuals to their home or to a healthcare facility. Event organisers should identify an isolation area for any individual who has COVID-like symptoms or who has tested positive but does not have symptoms.

*For further information and updates visit www.covid19health.gov.mt*