



# **Caribbean Public Health Agency Technical Guidance: COVID-19 Series No 38**

## **Cinema Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean**

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# Cinema Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean

10<sup>th</sup> August 2020

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This guidance document provides information on Cinemas (movie theatre) operation with respect to COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion and is subject to change as new information becomes available. It should be read in conjunction with relevant national legislation, regulations, and policies. This document has been adapted for the Caribbean situation, and therefore may differ from guidance developed by other agencies.

For an infographic version of this guideline to help with messaging to the public go to the CARPHA website: <https://carpha.org/Portals/0/Images/COVID-19%20Infographics/Cinema%20Operation/GuidanceForCinemaOperation-COVID19-CARPHA.pdf>

## Background

On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 as a pandemic. The majority of Caribbean countries have reported at least one confirmed case of COVID-19. CARPHA has assessed the risk of continued transmission in and to the Caribbean Region as Very High. While some CARPHA Member States (CMS) have succeeded in stopping transmission of the virus, some have reported sporadic cases, others have clusters, while only one CMS has reported community transmission. Within this context, several Member States have begun a phased lifting of in-country restrictions, initiated repatriation of nationals and some countries have opened their borders to travellers.

## What is COVID-19?

The virus belongs in the same family of coronaviruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), 2002/03 outbreak (Reuters, CDC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), 2012 outbreak. This 2019 virus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## How is it transmitted?

The virus can be spread by individuals from 2 days before and until 14 days after the onset of symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease. Currently, COVID-19 has been shown to spread by:

- Large respiratory droplets often produced by coughing or sneezing which land on a person or surface and transferred to the mouth or nose

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<sup>1</sup> CDC, 2020. Update and Interim Guidance on Outbreak of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in Wuhan, China available at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00426.asp>

<sup>2</sup> The 2019-nCoV Outbreak Joint Field Epidemiology Investigation Team, Qun Li. An Outbreak of NCIP (2019-nCoV) Infection in China — Wuhan, Hubei Province, 2019–2020[J]. China CDC Weekly, 2020,2(5): 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> WHO, 2020. Global surveillance for COVID-19 caused by human infection with COVID-19 virus.

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331506/WHO-2019-nCoV-SurveillanceGuidance-2020.6-eng.pdf>

- Direct or indirect contact with infected secretions
- Body fluids (e.g., blood, sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhea)
- Increasing evidence has led the WHO to indicate recently that airborne transmission cannot be ruled out at this point.<sup>4</sup>
- The COVID-19 virus **may** be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms
- **There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by water, mosquitoes, or food.**

## Objective

These guidelines are meant to guide cinema and movie theatre operations that may be ongoing or intending to re-start in CARPHA Member States. It should be used in conjunction with strategies and guidance provided at a country-specific level in each CMS.

Following the COVID-19 internal lockdown within most countries, the cinema industry, as well as movie and other types of theatres were closed to the public. Theatres are very popular forms of recreation where large number of persons gather in enclosed spaces. They are therefore very high-risk areas for the spread of infectious respiratory diseases. Examples of similar guidelines for the cinema and theatre industries can be found at the Box Office Pro<sup>5</sup>, the VUE<sup>6</sup>, OMDIA<sup>7</sup>, and Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago<sup>8</sup>.

Given the existing guidelines for COVID-19 and the Cinema and Theatre industries, this document summarizes the major issues, suggested responses, as well as the responsibilities for the various interventions required. This will, however, be given a Caribbean context to differentiate the situation and interventions required from those in other parts of the world.

## What are the Risk issues?

There are several activities that are associated with the cinema and theatre operations that can place patrons and staff at risk of infection, should they be exposed to a person infected with COVID-19. These include ticket sales, queuing for entry into shows, foyer areas and concession stands, movie accessories and bathroom facilities.

There is also the issue of support sectors. Cinema and theatre industries rely heavily on other sectors in manufacturing and retail to supply the necessary products and services required. This means that cinema and theatre locations are often visited by supply deliveries or service personnel who potentially expose workers to the COVID-19 virus. All recommendations in this document are based on reducing potential infection with the COVID-19 virus through contact with airborne virus particles or contact with virus contaminated exposed surfaces.

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<sup>4</sup> WHO, 2020. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2: implications for infection prevention precaution. 9 July 2020 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>.

<sup>5</sup> The Box Pro. 2020. <https://www.boxofficepro.com/experts-weigh-in-on-movie-theater-sanitation-measures/>

<sup>6</sup> The Vue. 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-52642152>

<sup>7</sup> OMDIA. 2020. <https://technology.informa.com/621515/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-global-cinema-business>

<sup>8</sup> TTMOH. 2020. <http://www.health.gov.tt/covid19/GuidelinesRegulations/Cinemas.pdf>

## **Recommended Measures for Protection during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The following sections outline actions to be taken to protect patrons, staff, and support services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1. Personal protection: Responsibility – All (industry workers, patrons, service personnel and supporting businesses and industries).**

- Maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene, and avoid close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.
- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub (60-80% ethanol or isopropanol content) or soap and water.
- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider.

### **2. Reduction of contact: Responsibility – All (industry workers and patrons)**

#### **I. Risk assessment and industry personnel:**

- The top priority for managers should be to ensure compliance with workplace health and safety (WHS) guidelines. These COVID-19 guidelines should be used as a complimentary guide to the WHS guidelines and should not be seen as a replacement of such. COVID-19 exposure should be added to the risk assessment protocols.
- Mandate workers that are ill to stay at home.
- Train all staff on new protocols for operation.
- Pay attention to the service periodicity for
- Heating/ventilation/air conditioning/ventilation (HVAC) systems to ensure filters are clean and working.

#### **II. Pre-Show activities 1: Ticket Sales**

- Encourage the use of online ticket purchases. This will reduce the queue line numbers and reduce the potential for overcrowding.
- Stagger movie showings to reduce number of patrons in different spaces at any one time
- Mandate the wearing of face masks for all patrons and personnel.
- Where queue lines are present, ensure proper signage for hygiene and sanitation.
- Use physical distancing markers on the ground especially for queue lines.
- Ensure that ticket sale personnel (cashiers) are protected behind glass screens.

#### **III. Pre-Show activities 2: Queue for entering Cinema / Theatre Foyer:**

- Where queue lines are present, ensure proper signage for hygiene and sanitation.
- Mandate the wearing of face masks for all patrons and personnel in queue lines.

- Use physical distancing markers on the ground especially for queue lines.
- Do temperature checks for all patrons as well as personnel entering the foyer.
- Prohibit entry to any person with temperature at 38 C or above or any individual that appears to exhibit flu-like illness.
- Ensure the availability and use of hand washing stations and hand sanitizers on entry into the foyer.
- Sanitize high touch surfaces regularly throughout the day using a CDC recommended sanitizer.
- Mandate support services and goods providers to wear facemasks.
- Limit or reduce exposure through unnecessary contact of workers with support services and goods providers.

**IV. Pre-show activities 3: Foyer and Concession stands:**

- Ensure proper signage for hygiene and sanitation in the Foyer. Include rules for physical distancing, loitering, concession stands and cinema seating.
- Ensure the availability and use of hand sanitizers stations in the foyer.
- Sanitize high touch surfaces regularly throughout the day using a CDC recommended sanitizer.
- Mandate the wearing of face masks for all persons in the foyer.
- Discourage loitering in the foyer areas.
- Use queue lines with uni-directional (one-way), physical distancing arrows for entry into and out of concession areas. This would help to limit the chances of unnecessary breach of physical distancing rules.
- Use ushers to aid with traffic management.
- Protect workers in the concession areas by using of glass (or plexi-glass) screens.

**V. Cinema/ theatre viewing:**

- Enforce the wearing of masks by all persons while entering or leaving the cinema or theatre room, especially when passing through the aisles and seat rows.
- Ensure that the cinema or theatre rooms are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before each audience group enters the theatre. These include sanitisation of floors, seats, and all other high touch surfaces.
- Ensure physical distancing rules are followed. Family groups can be seated together but maintain a 6-foot distance (approximately 3-4 seats) between groups.
- Use ushers to aid with traffic management and seating arrangements.
- Use disposable movie accessories (e.g. 3D glasses) or avoid the sharing of glasses by patrons, and where this is not possible, limit the viewing of 3D movies.

**VI. Bathroom areas:**

- Limit the number persons using the bathroom areas at the same time.
- Use controlled queues to the bathroom areas.
- Encourage patrons to continue to wear face masks while using the bathroom.

- Where possible install automatic faucets, hand-soap dispensers, and hand-sanitizers.
- Ensure proper sanitation of the bathroom areas at regular intervals during and after shows.

## References:

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020 Update and Interim Guidance on Outbreak of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in Wuhan, China. Available at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00426.asp>
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8. The Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago. 2020. The New Normal – Cinemas &Theatres. Available at <http://www.health.gov.tt/covid19/GuidelinesRegulations/Cinemas.pdf>

