

color



- Event planning

Setting up a COVID-19 safety program for events

The complete guide for event organizers

Introduction



Business is personal, and in-person events provide a very effective means to engage with customers, partners, shareholders, and employees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies and organizations around the world pivoted to online events as a means to maintain some level of personal engagement. Online events delivered mixed results for most organizations however. According to [a recent marketing study](#) by Business Insider, two out of three businesses struggled to achieve the same level of success from a virtual event compared to an in-person event.

Combined with the rapid decline in COVID-19 infection rates since the Omicron surge, it's no surprise that [a majority of attendees and exhibitors](#) want to return to in-person events. For many however, they still want the reassurance and peace of mind that comes with COVID-19 testing, vaccination and reporting protocols. Over 90 percent of the Freeman study respondents stated they were not opposed to additional health and safety protocols to enable them to gather safely.

While Freeman reports a high rate of vaccination among those who are likely to attend business events, vaccinations alone are not enough to control the spread of COVID-19. Event organizers need to carefully consider the interplay of vaccination levels, testing and onsite non-pharmacological interventions (NPIs) in order to minimize the risk to employees, partners and participants. For many organizations, health and safety considerations are inextricably linked to their brand value and employee satisfaction scores, underscoring the need for continued precautions.



Event safety in an endemic world

Beginning in February 2022, we've seen requirements for indoor mask wearing ease up significantly, in line with local ordinances and [CDC guidelines](#). It's worth noting however that the CDC anticipates that [variants of COVID-19 will continue to emerge](#), given the many unknowns about the virus trajectory and impact. As COVID-19 becomes endemic, having the right protocols in place prepares you for the unpredictable.

See how viral testing and vaccinations interact to reduce transmission using our Testing & Vaccine Modeling Tool [here](#) >

To that end, event organizers should build a multi-tiered strategy so they can respond quickly to protect their attendees and their business.

This guide will help you navigate some of the key considerations, protocols, and solutions for bringing attendees back to your next large-scale in-person event, safely.

Key Considerations for Planning Your Event

Whether planning a hybrid or fully in-person gathering, there are many key considerations that event planners and marketers need to be aware of to make sure staff, exhibitors and attendees feel safe and to ensure that organizers can introduce safety protocols with little friction or disruption to their event. To start, organizers should know that event testing can apply to a wide range of populations and use cases, including trade shows, seminars or conferences, company-wide retreats, product launch, sales kickoff and other company-specific events, customer appreciation events or shareholder meetings, and round table gatherings with customers and partners.

As a foundational principle, make COVID safety part of your overall strategy from the beginning. This will not only give attendees peace of mind, but will help to ensure all of your vendors, sub-contractors, exhibitors, sponsors, talent, and other stakeholders are aware of the requirements.

Define your overall COVID-19 safety plan, down to the specifics

There are many factors to consider when developing a COVID-19 safety plan for your event. Local ordinances, attendee and exhibitor profiles, vaccination rates, recency of surges or outbreaks all need to be taken into consideration. If you're working with a compliance vendor like Color, get them involved in the process early on so they can help you come up with the best end-to-end solution for your unique needs.

Similar to your overall event plan, we recommend you break your COVID-19 safety plan down into three discrete phases:

- **Pre-event** — specific actions that participants need to take before arriving at the event site and attending the event. For example, uploading vaccination confirmation data to the Color platform, conducting pre-event tests.
- **Day-of/during the event** — actions and emergency response plans to activate during the event. For example, responding to identified infections or localized outbreaks by disabling access badges for infected individuals; increasing onsite testing services.
- **Post event** — actions to “close out” the event for attendees, exhibitors, venue managers and local government agencies. For example, providing all attendees with a take-home/exit COVID-19 test; sharing team infection/health data with exhibitors; sharing overall data with event hosts, local government agencies, or franchise holders as required.

Once you've defined your broad goals for before, during and after the event, it's time to dig into the details. We've identified 6 core components or elements that need to be taken into consideration when building out a COVID-19 safety plan. These solutions can be used independently or together to create the safest event possible.

6 core building blocks

Vaccination status collection



- Easy-to-use software to manage participant vaccination status information
- Can meet requirements to maintain any level of compliance
- Status information can be used to dictate testing protocols and cadence

Ship-to-home lab-based testing



- Great for pre-event testing
- The safest way to avoid exposure and transmission before anyone begins traveling
- Self-administered and can be mailed to and from anywhere

On-site rapid testing



- Onsite results delivered in 15-30 minutes
- Customizable operations depending on the type of test (e.g., OTC vs. non-OTC) and technology used
- Technologies include rapid antigen or rapid molecular

Self-reported test results



- Convenient as a backup when participants are not able to send test kits back in time for results to be processed ahead of the event
- Works for both rapid and lab-based tests

Protocol management



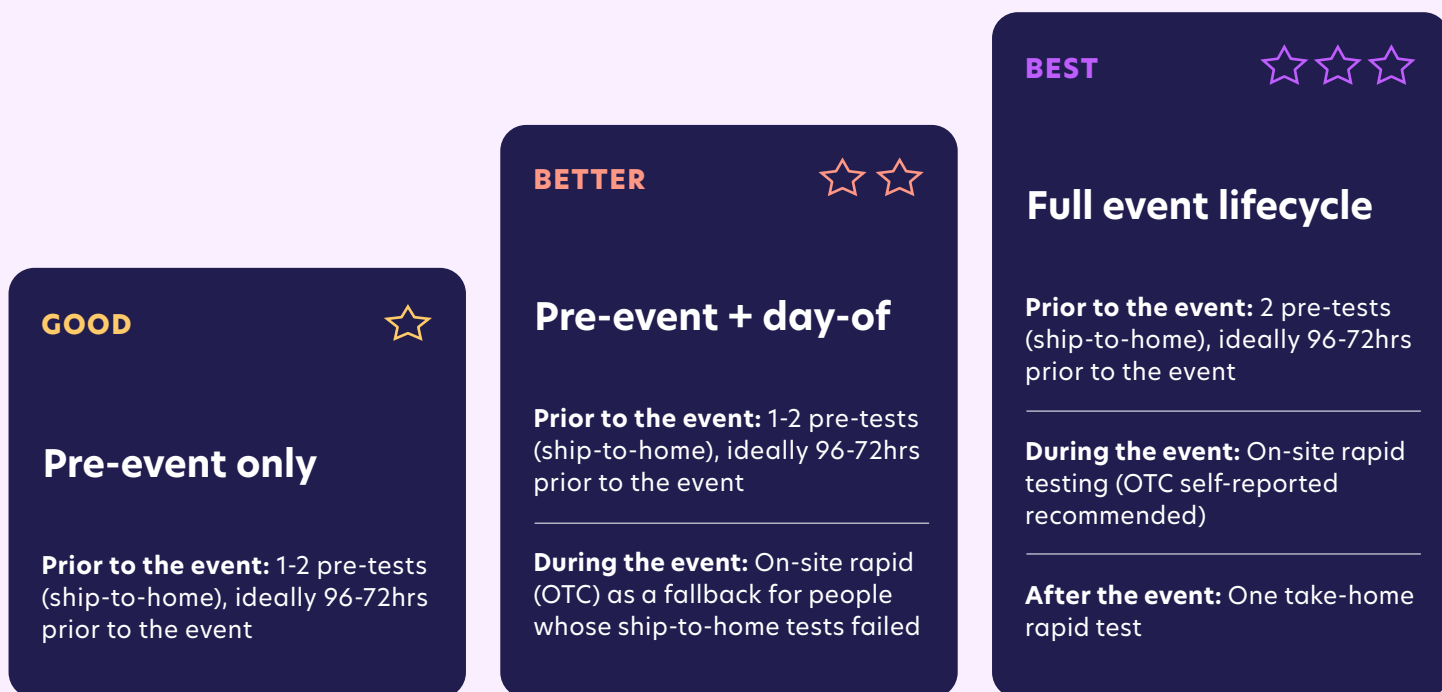
- Set up API feeds to ingest data, access result portals, receive testing reminders and notifications of positives, and manage event access

Analytics and reporting



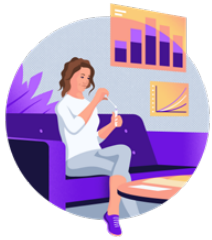
- Support for pre-analytical workflows and results sharing/reporting for varying testing types managed under one software platform
- Receive all the data that you may need to report test results to State and local public health authorities, as required

Based on your organization's appetite for risk versus need for safety, there are three levels of preparedness that you can consider.



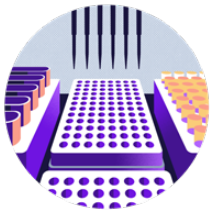
Whatever approach you adopt, we strongly recommend you include testing in your overall strategy as it makes it easier to operate your event in a predictable and stable fashion. Testing is one of the most effective tools in helping to limit the scale of COVID-19 outbreaks, taking into consideration all the other variables that come into play (vaccination rates, local infection levels, the use/lack of use of masks, etc). Recency and frequency of tests will have a big impact on how many people get infected at your event; tools such as the Color [Outbreak Modeling Tool](#) can help you get a deeper understanding of these variables and the impact they have on overall infection rates.

Assuming you decide to incorporate testing into your COVID-19 safety plan, there are then some foundational decisions you need to make about test volume, type and cost.



Test volume – How many tests do you anticipate conducting throughout your event?

Testing across the full lifecycle of the event – before, during and after – is the most comprehensive approach and has the highest probability of catching infections. These layers of testing will help attendees feel comfortable knowing that they have not contracted – or shared – the COVID-19 virus. This approach is also the most complex and costly however, so many organizations may choose a simplified approach.



Test type – What types of testing technologies do you intend to use?

There are two core types of COVID-19 test – molecular (also known as PCR, LAMP or NAAT), and antigen. Each has benefits and drawbacks – work with your event testing partner to come up with the best recommendation for your specific event. If rapid testing is required for your event, you should consider OTC antigen tests (such as Lucira, BinaxNow, etc), as they deliver a better testing experience for attendees. Attendees can conduct the test and log the test results in the reporting dashboard themselves, speeding up throughput and limiting the number of staff you need to assign to testing. Non-OTC rapid tests on the other hand require both a CLIA waiver and an ordering physician. As such, you will need to secure the CLIA license application in advance, a process that can take 30 days or more.

Check out Color's testing modality comparison chart to learn more about molecular and antigen tests.

[Color comparison sheet >](#)



Test cost – How do you balance different test types to deliver the best results, at an ideal cost?

Testing costs are more than just the cost of the supplies. You also need to consider staffing required to run your testing stations, shipping costs to the lab, and delivery costs to/from attendees if at-home pre-event testing is chosen.

While some of this may seem daunting, the right testing partner can provide the support and guidance for these key decisions by helping with program design, procurement, test fulfillment, onsite staffing, training, and more.




Develop a clear communications strategy for vendors and attendees

Make sure **attendees** are aware of the COVID-19 safety protocols, including testing requirements, vaccination status reporting, and any other NPIs they should anticipate (masks, social distancing, sanitation, etc). This should be clearly communicated to attendees prior to the event so they have the option to decline an invite, or choose not to attend, and can show up appropriately prepared. Create a comprehensive and accessible FAQ document or resource page prior to the event so you can easily redirect attendees' questions and update them with new information as conditions change.

You should also plan to communicate any requirements, clearly and consistently, during the event via signage and other reminders.

In addition to communicating clearly with attendees, make sure your **vendors** understand your COVID-19 protocols. Define and communicate safety protocols early in the process so you give vendors sufficient time to adjust their plans. If entry screening and ongoing testing will be part of the protocols in place, ensure you have space set aside for swabbing stations, biohazard bins and waiting areas. Consider creating a dedicated area for vendors and exhibitors to get tested so they can quickly transition into the exhibitor area.



How to Choose the Right Testing Partner

As you develop your plans for bringing large groups back together, make sure you also have a COVID safety partner that can help you do it safely, seamlessly and cost-effectively. Choose the right partner, and your group will feel confident and happy about getting back to event planning.

Here are some considerations for choosing an event testing and vaccination partner:

Premier service, end-to-end support:

When evaluating a testing and vaccination partner, don't just assume the partner has the resources on-board with the necessary soft and hard skills for the job. Ask to speak with the team.

Integrated management software:

Running a COVID-19 mitigation program requires more than just test kits and vaccines. Look for a partner with a software infrastructure that can be used to manage multiple testing and vaccination campaigns concurrently.

Support for multiple program structures and test types:

There are many approaches to testing, such as pre-event, day-of, post-event, and a combination of all three. Make sure your testing and vaccination partner has a solid grasp of all the approaches to testing and can support different testing modalities, including lab-based molecular, rapid molecular and rapid antigen tests.

Experience with large-scale events:

Make sure your testing and vaccination partner has the operational capacity to handle distributed services for an organization of your size.

A comprehensive platform including data insights:

An ideal COVID-19 testing and vaccination partner has the program architecture to manage large, dispersed populations such as show attendees, exhibitors and service providers.

A partner that can help you navigate the changing local and state-level regulations:

Regulations and guidelines are changing daily. You need a partner that can help maintain compliance with local regulations as well as event host and corporate guidelines.

Learn more about choosing the right testing partner and about Color's experience deploying large-scale healthcare programs during and prior to the pandemic [here](#) >

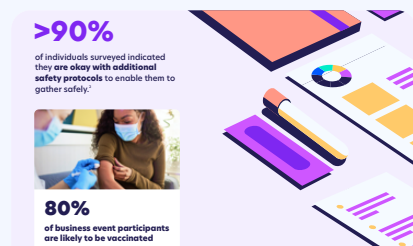
• Color in action

Global management consulting firm brings employees together with a series of company off-sites

A large global management consulting firm approached Color with a unique request — help them safely bring employees together at a series of off-site events in multiple locations, over the course of four weeks. They needed a partner that could help establish the right cadence and strategies to keep attendees safe, so they turned to Color for support. Read more about this partnership, plus other organizations we've helped with end-to-end event solutions [here](#) >

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COVID-19 testing for live events



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[Case Studies](#) ➔

COVID-19 testing for events – three unique approaches by Color customers



[Blog](#) ➔

5 key considerations for running in-person events safely

References

- *The truth about transitioning from in-person events to virtual, according to 200 marketing strategists.*, [Business Insider, 09/30/2021](#)
- *Research shows attending in-person business events is safer than some daily activities*, [Freeman, 08/2021](#)
- *Event Planning FAQs*, [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 09/2021](#)
- *Building Trust & Confidence with In-person Attendees*, [GES](#)



About Color

Color powers large-scale precision health programs for employers, health systems, research, and national health initiatives. We've been working with leading organizations to coordinate everything necessary to support both small – and large-scale, fully in-person events, so they can get back to doing what's best for their business.

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