



Onondaga County Health Department

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Recommendations for High School Graduations

Decisions around hosting safe and socially distanced graduation ceremonies will remain at the discretion of local school boards and superintendents. Districts and schools may choose to postpone graduation ceremonies, although it is not known when large-scale, in-person events will be able to be safely held. Alternatively, districts and schools can choose to honor graduating students in a way that prioritizes the health and safety of participants and complies with state and local social distancing orders and guidelines. We understand the importance of graduation ceremonies in the lives of our students and families. The Onondaga County Health Department is providing the following guidance for public school districts, public and nonpublic schools to consider when navigating these concerns at the local level.

Virtual ceremonies are the preferred recommendation

Districts and schools can honor graduating students virtually. Examples include:

- **Virtual ceremonies:** Schools can hold an online virtual ceremony similar to traditional graduation ceremonies in terms of commencement speakers and any acknowledgements of awardees. Viewing information can be disseminated to the graduates and their families.
- **Videos:** Ask graduates to send individual videos with short messages to their graduating classmates. This, with recorded speeches by invited speakers, creates a longer film highlighting the graduates' school experiences and provides a long-term memento.
- **Social Media:** Highlight graduates on social media each day with special hashtags that allow for family, friends, and community members to congratulate individual students (who agree to participate) with photos and messages.

Ceremonies that maintain social distancing require careful planning

Virtual events are strongly encouraged, although we recognize this may not be possible in all situations. Allowable in-person graduation events include:

- **Drive-Through Ceremonies (preferred):**
 - Students, and only their immediate family members who are staying at home together, should arrive in waves and leave after their individual recognition. Students may exit the car individually, in their cap and gown if available, to have a photo taken.
 - These events will require precise scheduling, traffic control, and school safety personnel, etc. and may be appropriate for small to medium-sized graduating classes in less trafficked areas.
 - Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.
 - Online live streaming could be made available for the extended family and friends to watch in real time.
- **Individualized Ceremony at Homes:** Visit each graduate's home, while remaining outside and at least six feet away, to congratulate and take photos of each graduate in their cap and gown and holding their diploma. This type of recognition may need to be conducted over the course of several days depending on the class size. These are time consuming and may not be feasible at this time due to logistic point of view.
- **Individualized Ceremony at School:** Since these gatherings can have large crowds, our recommendation is NOT to have these. Arrangements must be made to ensure social distancing and prevent mass gatherings of people.

The recommendations below must be employed, as appropriate, if drive-through ceremonies will be held.

1. Districts and schools should, if possible, ensure students receive diplomas and caps and gowns in advance through the mail or delivery so they can arrive dressed and with their diplomas in hand. Students or families may also collect these items at the school during packet pick-up, meal distribution, or locker clean-out. Please ensure social distancing guidelines are followed.
2. There may be no person-to-person contact during the ceremony. Individuals may not hand students their diplomas, or any other items, or shake graduates' hands.
3. Clearly communicate expectations and procedures related to photography. Please ensure students and families are aware of photography policies.
4. Anyone outside of their car must wear a mask or face covering. Individual students may remove their masks or face coverings while having their individual photo taken by the district or school. Only staff and one student at a time can be outside of the car.
5. Consider limiting attendance and broadcasting the ceremony via a livestream platform and recording the ceremony to provide access to those not in attendance.
6. Take appropriate precautions for individuals outside of their cars related to weather protection and timing of the ceremonies such as sun exposure, heat, and rain. Also consider if cars need to be turned off during the ceremony.
7. There should be no restroom access or refreshments to prevent areas of congregation and additional areas to monitor. Students and families should be advised in advance that restroom facilities and refreshments will not be available.
8. Ensure that facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.
9. Set expectations, policies, and guidelines in advance, and reiterate those before the ceremony day and at the start of the ceremony, to ensure overall health and safety.

We congratulate all the graduates and their families and wish everyone the best for safe, healthy, and happy graduation ceremonies.