

NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



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March 26, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Higher Education Presidents, Chancellors, and Administrators
FROM: Stephanie Rodriguez, Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Higher Education Department
CC: Dr. Patricia Trujillo, Deputy Secretary, New Mexico Higher Education Department
RE: Commencement Ceremonies

The New Mexico Higher Education Department, in consultation with the [New Mexico Department of Health](#) (NMDOH) and State of New Mexico, has developed guidelines for commencement ceremonies taking place this year.

Commencement ceremonies may be conducted in accordance with the public health order dependent upon the [Red to Green Framework](#) for large entertainment venues and the NMDOH's [map](#) on the public dashboard. Please be aware that the map is updated every 14 days, and many counties are rapidly moving into the Yellow, Green, and, more recently, Turquoise levels. If the status of the county changes at any time during the 14-day rolling average, the status of the county will be honored 14 days prior to the scheduled commencement ceremony.

In a "Turquoise Level" county, commencement ceremonies may take place:

- in outdoor venues with up to 75% the maximum capacity in spectator areas; or
- in indoor venues with up to 33% the maximum capacity in spectator areas.

In a "Green Level" county, commencement ceremonies may take place:

- in outdoor venues with up to 50% the maximum capacity in spectator areas; or
- in indoor venues with up to 25% the maximum capacity in spectator areas.

In a "Yellow Level" county, commencement ceremonies with spectators may only take place in outdoor venues, which many have up to 25% the maximum capacity in spectator areas. And in a "Red Level" county, commencement ceremonies can take place virtually or in a vehicle drive-thru format only in which all awardees and members of the public must remain in their vehicles at all times.

Additionally, COVID-safe practices must always be adhered to for all participants and attendees. These include:

- All participants must wear masks prior to entering the venue, for the duration of the event, and while queuing for their entrance and receiving their award. Masks may not be removed until individuals have completely left the venue and parking lot.
- All participants must maintain proper social distancing throughout the event with the exception of family pods. Each individual family pod may not exceed eight (8) individuals.
- A graduate may take his or her mask off to take a professional photograph before or after receiving an award. The individual must be the only person in the frame and must immediately put the mask back on after the photograph is taken. Graduates may not remove masks while standing in line for the photo.

- When an award is presented, please refrain from any sort of contact aside from passing awards or documents to graduates. For graduate-level ceremonies and presentations, hooding and pinning may take place, however, a mask must be worn at all times by all participants.
- Singers and wind instruments are only permitted for outdoor venues and must observe enhanced social distancing of nine (9) feet. Additionally, singers must wear multi-layered cloth masks while singing. Musicians playing wind instruments must wear instrument-specific multi-layered cloth masks and bell covers while playing.

Questions

The NMHED appreciates your ongoing support of the agency, public health orders, and executive orders. If you have any questions surrounding commencement ceremonies, please contact the agency via email at NMHED.COVID@state.nm.us. The appropriate individual will respond to your questions promptly.