Health & safety plan update

The Board of Trustees and House of Delegates offices have received several questions regarding the recent J-22 April Update, particularly regarding the Health and Safety (H&S) plan delineated in it. While your Board recognizes that there is a wide spectrum of individual views on what the appropriate protocols could or should be, our goal was to return the House to an in-person meeting with a balance between maximizing safety and minimizing intrusion into our normal deliberative process. It can be reviewed on the AMA website at H&S Plan. This communication providing further detail regarding the plan is intended to answer your questions and ameliorate your concerns.

The H&S plan was approved by the Board at its April meeting utilizing the best evidence available to mitigate the risk and balance the various needs of our individual attendees. The plan was not based on any single observation of how other meetings or a particular geographic area have fared, but rather a comprehensive analysis of the data and science available. This included prevalence trends, number of attendees expected, recent experiences at other similar meetings, the interests of those immunocompromised and with unvaccinated children among us who would like to attend, and potential reputational risk to our AMA by media coverage.

Pre-register to attest to vaccination status

As noted in the plan, all participants and guests must be “up to date” with their COVID vaccinations. For the purposes of this meeting, up-to-date corresponds to the CDC recommendations as of April 2, 2022. All participants and Federation staff, including HOD Delegates and Alternates, MUST pre-register to attest to their vaccination status for themselves and their guests via CVENT. The registration process can be accessed via the main page on the AMA website for either the HOD or the sections. Please register for only the HOD or the sections, not both. Those with medical exemptions should email vaxExempt@ama-assn.org by May 15 to receive further instructions.

Testing part of H&S plan

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/house-delegates/annual-meeting/2022-annual-meeting-hod-april-22-speakers-update

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Testing is also part of the H&S plan. Tests will be self-administered rapid antigen tests, provided at no expense to meeting attendees and guests, and will be distributed at the H&S desk located on the first floor of the East Tower of the Hyatt. All attendees will be asked to complete the tests in their hotel rooms, if possible, or in designated testing areas if unable to access their hotel rooms. Attendees will return to the H&S desk to attest to negative test results for themselves and any guests. They will then proceed to the meeting registration desk to obtain their meeting badge and other meeting materials. No one will be permitted into the meeting areas without a badge.

Because this is a six-day meeting (plus additional days for many of us), attendees will also receive a second COVID rapid test (a two-pack test kit will be provided) to use three days after initial check-in to ensure continued negative status. The attestation on registration day will require attendees to notify the health and safety desk of any positive result. A repeat attestation will not be required with this second test.

Those who test positive will not be permitted to participate in any AMA meetings or events until completing the CDC criteria to end quarantine (CDC Quarantine Guidance). The false positive rate for rapid antigen testing is low, but participants may choose to do a confirmatory PCR test at their discretion. At this time, there are local providers in Chicago that offer rapid results on PCR tests and accept insurance. Should the PCR test be negative, attendees who had a positive antigen test will be permitted to resume meeting activities.

Some have asked why we aren’t planning to test only those who are symptomatic. Since approximately 40% of COVID infections are asymptomatic, your Board decided that merely testing those with symptoms would provide inadequate protection. Others have asked why not just require a PCR test before leaving home? PCR tests provide higher specificity; however, they remain positive for some period after active infection, excluding some individuals who could safely attend. In addition, in order to have a timely result, a PCR test would have to be completed at least 48 hours before departure. Individuals with a negative result could potentially become contagious within that period. We believe that our approach of requiring a test upon arrival will do more to mitigate the risks of transmission at the meeting. Nonetheless, we do encourage attendees and guests to perform a home test prior to departing for Chicago to avoid unnecessary travel.

Masking at the meeting

The final decision regarding masking will be made closer to the event and will be communicated at that point. It is hoped by instituting the H&S measures reviewed above that we will not need to require masks. Of course, masks are welcome and a limited supply will be available at the meeting. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own appropriately fitted masks.
While COVID hospitalizations thankfully remain relatively low, COVID prevalence is again on the rise across the country. It is difficult to predict in advance with any confidence whether this will be better or worse in June. Our H&S plan is consistent with CDC guidance for those attending meetings like ours (CDC Festival/large group guidance). Due to this unpredictability, the Board thought it was prudent to take multiple steps to enhance the safety of our attendees.

It is our hope that we can convene our House of Delegates safely and productively utilizing the H&S protocol outlined above. We appreciate the feedback we have received, and look forward to seeing you in Chicago to tackle the large amount of important work that lies ahead of us.

Thank you for your dedication to our AMA.

-- Responses should be directed to HOD@ama-assn.org

**Additional Speakers' updates**

For additional speakers’ updates visit the updates overview page.