Advice Sheet - Guidance for Attending Mass Gatherings and Events

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Categories: Security

Mass gatherings range from small community events and religious services to large concerts, festivals, and sporting fixtures. While the vast majority pass without incident, they inherently concentrate people, vehicles, and attention in one place, which can increase exposure to risks such as crowd crush, petty crime, fire, disorder, and targeted attacks. Most attendees are not specifically targeted but can be harmed simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Associated risks are not limited to any one country or city; high-profile incidents have also occurred at such events in low-threat locations. Even well-organised events in developed countries can experience dangerous crowding, poor emergency access, opportunistic crime, or crisis incidents.

The most effective way to reduce vulnerability is to plan ahead and remain situationally aware: understand the local threat environment, know your routes and exits, position yourself carefully within crowds, and avoid areas that are becoming overly congested, agitated, or poorly controlled. Even at seemingly low-risk events, staying alert, keeping a low profile, and being prepared to leave early can significantly improve your personal safety.

Advice for Individuals Attending Events

1. Before you go

Understand the destination and event

- Reconsider nonessential travel into areas where authorities have highlighted elevated risks around public events or large gatherings.
- Review recent incidents or credible threats in the area, including crowd incidents, crime around events, or tensions that might affect public spaces.
- Check official travel and security advisories (for example, your home government's foreign affairs website) for up-to-date information on the location and any planned demonstrations or major events.
- If your employer or security provider offers briefings or alerts, review their latest guidance for the city or venue.

Know the venue and key locations

- Familiarise yourself with the event layout if possible: main entry/exit points, pedestrian-only zones, and any fixed barriers (bollards, planters, walls) protecting attendees.

- Note whether the event is mainly indoors, outdoors, or mixed, and how this affects your options to shelter from weather or move away quickly if needed.

- On arrival in the city, identify nearby hospitals, police stations, and, if abroad, your embassy or consulate, as well as your accommodation and the venue. Note at least one alternative route between them.

Plan transport, routes, and meeting points

- Choose routes and, if driving, parking areas slightly away from the densest crowd flows and streets with direct vehicle access to event entrances.

- Agree meeting points with your group in advance, away from pinch points and vehicle access, in case you become separated.

- Share your general plans (venue, approximate timings, who you are with) with a trusted contact who is not attending—especially for large, late-night, or unfamiliar events.

Prepare yourself, your group, and your tech

- Carry only essential valuables. Secure IDs, cards, and devices so they are hard to snatch. Prefer electronic payments and carry only small amounts of cash; use ATMs with extra caution.

- Dress for comfort, weather, and prolonged standing. Wear practical footwear and consider layers for temperature changes.

- Keep a low profile: avoid obvious displays of wealth (wads of cash, expensive jewellery, high-value electronics on show).

- Dress in a neutral, unobtrusive way where possible, avoiding clothing or symbols that could be interpreted as supporting particular political, social, or religious groups, especially if local tensions are elevated.

- Bring any essential medication and any aids you may need to move quickly or stand for long periods.

- Fully charge your phone, store key emergency numbers, and bring a power bank if you may be out for several hours. Enable screen lock and “find my device” features where possible.

- Do not leave personal items unattended, including inside vehicles.

- If you are responsible for children, elderly individuals, or anyone with mobility or medical needs, plan extra time and support for entering, moving around, and leaving the event.

2. While at the event

Maintain situational awareness

- On arrival, consciously locate at least two exits, the nearest first-aid point, and any obvious choke points (narrow corridors, bottlenecks, steep stairways).

- Stay alert to changes in crowd density, mood, and movement; avoid becoming so absorbed in your phone, music, or alcohol that you stop noticing what’s happening around you.

- Be aware of vehicles around event perimeters and access roads, especially if they appear to be driving unusually, too fast, or too close to pedestrian areas.
- If you notice an abnormally large gathering of security, police, or emergency staff converging on one area, calmly move away; they may be responding to a situation that could escalate.
- Move confidently and with purpose. People who appear lost, confused, or isolated are more likely to be targeted by opportunistic criminals.

Position yourself sensibly in crowds

- Avoid standing in the middle of very dense crowds or in obvious choke points (tunnels, narrow corridors, stair heads, tight pens, fenced areas).
- Stay closer to the edges where you have more space and can move away if needed. Avoid standing in areas where vehicles have direct access, such as immediately beside roads or car parks without barriers.
- Where possible, stay near sturdy structures (bollards, planters, walls) that could provide some protection from vehicles, but avoid boxing yourself in against them.
- If you feel you are being followed or watched in a way that concerns you, do not confront the person. Move calmly towards a busy, well-lit public place or into a venue with visible staff or security, and stay there until you feel safe and have informed a trusted contact.

Manage your behaviour and be ready to leave early

- Moderate or avoid alcohol and any substances that may impair judgement, awareness, or reaction time—especially in very crowded settings.
- Keep food and drink with you at all times to reduce the risk of tampering.
- Avoid heated conversations about politics, religion, or other sensitive issues, particularly with strangers. Keeping your views to yourself reduces the chance of misunderstandings.
- Stay hydrated and pace yourself; if you begin to feel unwell, step away from the densest part of the crowd.
- Be prepared to leave early if:
    - Movement becomes very restricted or painful.
    - You see pushing, surging, or signs of panic.
    - You feel that crowd control, security, or staff presence is not adequate.

3. If an incident or emergency occurs

Crowds and sudden surges

- If the crowd starts to surge or you feel strong pressure:
    - Keep your arms bent and in front of your chest to create space to breathe.

        - Move with the general flow rather than pushing against it, then gradually work your way towards the edge where there is more space.
        - Avoid getting pinned against barriers, fences, glass frontages, or other rigid structures.
    - If you fall and cannot get up immediately, curl into a ball, protect your head and chest with your arms, and get back to your feet as soon as it is safe to do so.

Violence, disorder, or vehicle threat

- If you notice a fight, disorder, or aggressive behaviour nearby, move away early rather than staying to watch. Create distance and put solid objects (walls, structures) between yourself and the disturbance where possible.
- For a suspected vehicle threat near pedestrian areas:
    - Move laterally out of the vehicle's path rather than simply running straight ahead.
    - Get behind the nearest solid obstacle (wall, bollard, large planter) if you can do so safely.
- If there are loud bangs, gunfire, explosions, or other serious violence:
    - Move away from the source, using cover such as buildings, walls, or terrain.
    - Avoid following the densest panic flow if there are safer, less crowded options, but do not move against the majority flow in a confined space.
    - Follow instructions from event staff, stewards, or emergency services where it is safe to do so.

If you encounter a large, moving crowd or demonstration

- If a large crowd or demonstration forms near the event and you are:
    - **On foot:** stay calm, avoid drawing attention to yourself, and initially move with the flow until you can work your way to the edge. Leave via a side street or safe exit as soon as practical, staying away from obvious flashpoints or confrontations.
    - **Driving:** if you see a large crowd ahead, turn away as soon as it is safe, avoiding dead ends or narrow roads. Never attempt to drive through a crowd. If you become boxed in, keep doors locked, remain calm, and look for a safe opportunity to reverse or turn away slowly. If you cannot move the vehicle safely, park, lock it, and leave on foot to a secure location if it is safe to do so.
- Avoid areas where police or security forces appear to be confronting crowds directly, as bystanders may be affected by crowd-control measures or pushing and surging.

After the incident

- Once you are in a safe place:
    - Check yourself and others for injuries and seek medical attention if needed.

        - Send a brief “I’m safe” message to key contacts to reduce concern and free up communication lines.

- Follow official instructions regarding cordoned areas and do not return to the incident site to film or take photos.
- If you have information that could help, report it to local authorities through official channels.

4. Petty crime and interactions with authorities

- In the event of robbery or a direct threat, your personal safety is more important than possessions. Stay as calm as possible, comply with demands, avoid sudden or confrontational movements, and focus on getting away safely when you can.
- Do not chase offenders. Move promptly to a safe, populated place (e.g. hotel, shopping centre, police station) and reassess from there.
- When speaking with police or other officials, ask for identification if the situation allows. If you are abroad, you can request to contact your embassy or consulate.
- If you are detained or there is a misunderstanding about your involvement in an incident, remain polite, comply with instructions, and contact your embassy/consulate and, where applicable, your employer or security provider as soon as you reasonably can.
- After any incident:
    - Check for injuries and seek medical care if needed.
    - Report thefts or assaults to the police and, where relevant, your embassy or consulate.
    - If your passport or travel documents are stolen, contact your embassy for replacement or emergency documents.
    - If your wallet or phone is stolen, cancel payment cards, secure or remotely wipe your phone if possible, and change passwords for key accounts (email, banking, messaging).

Advice for Organisations Attending Events

Organisations may host, sponsor, or send staff to public events ranging from small receptions to large concerts, festivals, and sporting fixtures. While most pass without incident, events can expose staff to elevated risks such as crowding, transport disruption, opportunistic crime, and, in rarer cases, disorder or targeted attacks. These risks can arise in any country, including those generally considered low risk.

An organisation’s role is not to eliminate all risk, but to understand it, brief staff clearly, and put proportionate measures in place. Sensible preparation, appropriate venue selection, and clear communication often make the difference between a minor disruption and a serious duty-of-care issue.

1. Pre-event risk assessment and advisory

- Conduct concise, event-specific risk assessments for both indoor and outdoor elements, covering crowd density, access/egress, vehicle exposure, fire safety, weather, public disorder, and—in higher-risk locations—deliberate attacks.
- Draw on multiple sources: official travel advisories, local authorities, reputable media, and any contracted security/intelligence providers, to identify upcoming demonstrations, major events, or tensions that may affect crowds.
- Share clear, accessible advisories with staff, including:
    - Any known concerns around the venue or area.
    - Practical guidance on travel, timing, dress, and behaviour.
    - Whether attendance is mandatory or voluntary, and any restrictions for higher-risk events or individuals.

2. Duty of care, policies, and preparation

- Define and communicate travel, event, and attendance policies, including circumstances where employees may reasonably decline participation based on risk.
- Provide targeted training or briefings on:
    - Situational awareness and basic personal security.
    - Crowd safety and how to move safely in dense environments.
    - What to do in common emergency scenarios (sudden crowd surges, fire alarms, medical incidents, nearby disorder).
- Plan for accessibility and inclusion, including considerations for employees who are pregnant, have disabilities, have underlying health or mobility conditions, or language needs.
- For larger or higher-risk events, consider simple tabletop or walk-through exercises for managers and key staff (e.g. “How do we account for everyone and communicate if we need to leave quickly?”).

3. Event and venue controls

- Require venues to demonstrate:
    - Realistic capacity limits and systems to monitor crowd density.
    - Clearly marked, unobstructed exits and maintained escape routes.
    - A thought-through crowd-flow design that avoids dangerous bottlenecks and dead ends.
    - A visible, appropriately trained security and medical presence.
- Ensure there is appropriate separation of vehicle and pedestrian flows around entrances, exits, and gathering points. Where relevant, verify existing vehicle barriers at vulnerable approach points.

- Confirm that procedures are in place for:
    - Bag checks and prohibited items.
    - Lost-child and vulnerable-person management.
    - Temporary suspension or early closure of the event if conditions become unsafe (e.g. severe weather, unmanageable crowding).

4. Monitoring, communication, and crisis readiness

- For significant events, monitor official advisories, local news, and security updates before and during the event to spot developing issues (e.g. transport disruption, protests, severe weather). Adjust timings, routes, or attendance if needed.
- Establish clear communication plans for staff:
    - How they will receive last-minute updates or instructions before and during the event.
    - How they should check in or confirm safety after a serious incident.
- Designate crisis-response leads with clear authority to:
    - Account for staff quickly.
    - Issue instructions (e.g. delay, reroute, shelter on site, leave early).
    - Activate medical, psychological, and travel support as required.
- Ensure any systems used to track staff location or status are secure, proportionate, and compliant with data-protection and privacy requirements.

5. Post-incident follow-up and continuous improvement

- After serious incidents, conduct timely welfare checks and confirm employee status.
- Offer appropriate medical and mental-health support (including Employee Assistance Programs where available), and communicate available resources clearly.
- Debrief with staff and partners, document what worked well and what did not, and use these lessons to refine:
    - Future event-approval processes.
    - Briefing and training materials.
    - Internal policies on travel and event attendance.

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