

CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES FOR THE B.P.O.E.
(Please distribute these Guidelines to all Lodge Officers)

Grand Lodge Advisory Committee recently held a conference call to discuss the coronavirus issue and how Lodges should proceed during this unprecedented health crisis. They offer the following guidelines that may be applied to all of our Lodges in every State. Items listed below are a guide for each State Sponsor so he can establish further guidelines for the State Associations and Local Lodges he oversees.

Since every State, and even localities within a State, are issuing different guidelines on activities and closures, the Advisory Committee determined that restrictions/limitations regarding the virus should be left to each State Sponsor and that the Lodges should follow their State government directives, along with local and state health official guidelines, as overseen, encouraged and/or directed by the State Sponsors. An example of the differences is that some states have closed bars and restaurants, others have not ordered closures, but most all are limiting gatherings to groups of no more than 50, 25, 20, 10 or even 4 persons, depending on the Federal, State and Local mandate.

It was determined that if bars and restaurants are closed in your State, then your bar and kitchen must also be closed. Some Lodges, located in States which has not ordered the closures, are closing their bar and kitchen anyway, opting for on the side of caution, and that is acceptable. If the bar and kitchen are closed, most States do not prohibit access to the Lodge facility in order to conduct needed services/repair and/or to conduct Lodge business as long as the gathering exceeds the mandated total.

In some cases, where there are closures of the bar and kitchen, a Lodge may still allow Members to access the Lodge, subject to the limitation of the size of gatherings, thereby allowing Members gather in small groups for cards, gaming machines, pull tabs, and other minor activities. If allowed, these Lodges must take extra care to have hand sanitizers available at all entrances and often clean and disinfect high traffic areas. Members who appear ill should be asked to leave the Lodge immediately and to always follow best practices and CDC guidelines. If entry is allowed, it should be restricted to Members Only and no Guests may be invited to the Lodge.

Here are some guidelines Local Lodges may or may not fall under depending on the current actions of the Federal, State or Local Executive Orders.

Any further guidance, assistance and directives on how these will be applied to your State Association and Local Lodge should be directed to your State Sponsor.

Some of the suggested guidelines below are not strictly in accordance with GL Statutes, but these are difficult times and we must proceed as best we can to conduct the business of the Lodge, treating the current health crisis as an emergency situation.

Member Access – Depending on the State you live in, Members may still be allowed access to your Lodge facility, but we must maintain our Lodges cannot be opened to the public, therefore Members are not permitted to bring guests into the Lodge. Many States have restrictions as to the number of Members who can gather at one time. As a suggestion and extra precaution, in deference to our older Members, it is strongly suggested that every Lodge follow the CDC recommendation of a 10-Member limitation for any gathering. Depending on the mandates or executive orders by Federal, State or Local authorities, there may or may not be food or beverage service, which may include no BYOB service. There may or may not be provisions for food or drink being consumed on Lodge property. When permitted by Federal, State or Local Law, Lodges that can operate with a profitable carry-out food service are permitted to do so, provided they exercise the utmost care for the safety of their workers.

If Member access is allowed, the Lodge must take extra steps for the safety of Members, have hand sanitizers available, and clean and disinfect high traffic areas often. Members who appear ill should be asked to stay home, and if they come to the Lodge, must be directed to leave the Lodge immediately. Of course, during this crisis, any Lodge may deny a Member's access into their facility except for official meetings and to conduct of Lodge business. If allowed, Lodge access should always be permitted in order to conduct needed services/repair and/or conduct Lodge business, i.e., for Secretaries, Treasurers, Officers, Trustees/Boards and Committees to perform their official duties and conduct meetings on behalf of the Lodge.

Regular Lodge Meetings – If allowed, Lodges are urged to proceed with their Regular Lodge Meetings. Grand Lodge Statutes provide that a Quorum is 9 Members (7 in Lodges with fewer than 100 Members), so even with the 10-Member limitation, the Officers/Members can conduct the Regular Lodge Meetings. If more than 10 Members attend a meeting, then the additional Members could be seated just outside the Lodge Room in groups of not more than 10, listening to the proceedings, and invited into the Lodge Room one by one to speak, if desired. A vote of the Lodge could be taken in the same way, allowing the overflow Members to enter the Lodge Room one by one to vote.

Lodge Meetings should be limited only to the business that is necessary, and the length of the meeting should be shortened as much as possible to prevent any prolonged exposure of possibly contracting the virus. While this procedure is unusual, since most Regular Lodge Meetings do not draw a large crowd, this approach should work easily. Thus, allowing the Lodges to keep abreast in handling all of the Lodge business. If deemed prudent and appropriate by the Lodge Officers, a Lodge may still apply to the District Deputy for dispensation from holding a Regular Lodge Meeting, and that request will be granted.

Installation of Officers - Installation of the new Lodge Officers is considered to be very important. A Lodge must have their new Officers installed, this action gives the membership knowledge of who is in charge and provides that the Lodge Leadership is in place to make necessary decisions for the Lodge. Advisory did opine that Installations may take place at a Regular Lodge Meeting, or elsewhere, and that any Past Exalted Ruler or outgoing Exalted Ruler, may conduct a modified or shortened version of the Installation, with or without other Installing Officers being involved. Whichever way installation is accomplished, we must keep in mind the most important part is the Oath of Office. If done outside of a Regular Lodge Meeting, the Installation must be recorded in the minutes of the next Meeting by the Lodge Secretary or recorded as minutes of a Special Meeting.

Initiations - All pending Initiations should be handled quickly, prior to the end of March, and by the best means possible. Whether Initiations are during a Regular Lodge Meeting, inside or outside the Lodge Room, individually or with a group(s) of new Members; because of the virus concerns, you may use a modified or shortened version of the Ritual, which may involve one or more Officers. The goal? To make sure that each new Member does take the Obligation and signs the required documents. The new Members can then be invited back to the Lodge, at a later date, to observe a traditional Initiatory Ritual. Again, this is done to shorten the length of the meeting and in an abundance of caution. If done outside the Lodge Room, the information must be included in the minutes of the next Lodge Meeting or recorded as minutes of a Special Meeting.

District Deputy Clinics - Clinics should remain scheduled as planned, subject to the ever-changing conditions and further Notice. The District Deputy, in conjunction with the State Sponsor, will decide as soon as it becomes clear that the Clinic can or cannot be held safely. If not, the Clinic may be postponed to a later date. If the later date is cancelled, then the Spring Clinic will likely be cancelled. If cancelled, it will be up to the District Deputy to mail or deliver the usual GL Packets, and any other important information, to each of the District Lodges, and up to the Lodges to make sure that they receive the Packets as required.

State Convention - The State Sponsor and State Association Leadership is in touch with the Convention Hotel and is aware of current State government guidelines. Depending on the date of the session it may be too early to make the call, but the decision about holding the State Convention will be made as soon as circumstances allow. Until you hear otherwise, it is on.

National Convention - The Convention Committee is well-aware of the situation and in touch with the Maryland Convention hotels and officials. Maryland State guidelines may make the decision for us (their restaurants and bars are currently closed). It is much too early to decide, but if a decision is made to cancel, that decision will be made in early to mid-June, if not sooner. Otherwise, again, until you hear otherwise, it is on.