



# Covid-19: Medical conferences around the world are cancelled after US cases are linked to Massachusetts meeting

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Medical conferences around the world have been cancelled because of fears about covid-19 after a meeting in Massachusetts was linked to 70 suspected cases.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health announced earlier this month that 15 suspected cases of covid-19 in the state had a direct connection to a meeting of staff from the biotech company Biogen, held in Boston in late February.<sup>1</sup>

Two days later the Massachusetts state governor, Charlie Baker, declared a state of emergency.<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts currently has six confirmed cases of covid-19 and 89 suspected cases.<sup>3</sup>

Fears about covid-19 have also led to numerous medical conferences around the world being postponed or cancelled. In the UK the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) and the Royal College of Anaesthetists have both postponed their annual conferences until 2021, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists has cancelled or postponed all gatherings of over 100 people.

In a statement about the postponement of its conference the RCP president, Andrew Goddard, said that it “simply wouldn’t be sensible” to bring together hundreds of doctors from all over the UK and abroad when they were dealing with covid-19.

He said, “We shouldn’t put doctors at unnecessary risk of contracting or spreading the virus, so it is a wise precaution to postpone Medicine 2020. Now, as always, I want to protect the wellbeing of the NHS workforce.”

In the US numerous meetings have also been cancelled, including the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research and the American College of Physicians’ internal medicine meeting 2020.

The National Institutes of Health has called for all large meetings and symposiums that are not “mission critical” and are scheduled to be held at its facilities or organised by it to be held virtually, postponed, or cancelled.

## Social distancing

Commenting on the cancellations, Simon Fleming, vice chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges’ trainee doctors’

group, said, “The profession, including trainees, completely understands the need for social distancing, trying to delay the virus, and the call for all hands at the pump in this challenging time for the NHS.

“The reassuring thing is that the statutory educational bodies are listening and completely understanding trainee (and non-trainee) concerns,” he said. “We are pleased that they appear to be being pragmatic and empathetic, when it comes to leave being lost, funding previously claimed for, and future appraisals/ARCP [annual review of competency progression] process.”

A spokesperson for Biogen said that it was working with all relevant departments of public health and hospitals to prioritise the wellbeing of anyone who may have been exposed to covid-19.

They added, “Although our office based colleagues have been directed to work from home since last Friday (6 March), essential staffing levels remain in place, including key personnel in our laboratories and manufacturing facilities in order to meet the needs of the patients we serve.

“At this stage, we do not anticipate any significant disruption in our ability to supply medicines to our patients, and of course we continue to closely monitor the dynamic situation.”

- 1 Massachusetts Department of Public Health. 15 new presumptive positive cases of covid-19 identified by Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory. 8 Mar 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/news/15-new-presumptive-positive-cases-of-covid-19-identified-by-massachusetts-state-public-health>.
- 2 Baker C. No 591: Declaration of a state of emergency to respond to covid-19. 10 Mar 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/executive-orders/no-591-declaration-of-a-state-of-emergency-to-respond-to-covid-19>.
- 3 Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Covid-19 cases, quarantine and monitoring. Mar 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-cases-quarantine-and-monitoring>.

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