

Mass gatherings: Overview — health risks at sports events

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Mass gatherings (MG) are events attended for a variety of purposes by at least 1,000, usually over 25,000 people at a specific location. Among the largest was the Kumbh Mela 2013 in Allahabad lasting 55 days with 120 million devotees. Unplanned MG, e.g. funerals or political rallies are of great concern, as the infrastructure is ill prepared.

Sports events also draw large crowds. Usually there are no major public health incidents at MG — the Rio Summer Olympics in 2016 were no exception despite of hysterical Zika concerns — but there is a higher incidence of injury and illness as compared to the general population. More than 70% of consultations are associated with non-communicable health problems. Although the vast majority of these problems are trivial, the sheer numbers result in stress for the health facilities.

The conceptual MG model developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) bases on health security and health promotion; there should be a legacy for the event and also for the host population. Risk factor calculation allows conclusions on the health infrastructure needed. Before mass gatherings the WHO and other organizations issue travel health advice. Usually recommendations include reduction of risk exposure by 'clever behavior' and immunizations.

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