Does ASHRAE’s guidance agree with guidance from WHO and CDC?

ASHRAE’s guidance does not conflict with guidance from WHO and CDC.

The CDC’s position currently is:

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community (“community spread”) in many affected geographic areas. Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.

The WHO’s position currently is:

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets are relatively heavy, do not travel far and quickly sink to the ground. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus. This is why it is important to stay at least 1 metre (3 feet) away from others....

WHO is assessing ongoing research on the ways that COVID-19 is spread and will continue to share updated findings.

ASHRAE’s position is:

Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through the air is sufficiently likely that airborne exposure to the virus should be controlled. Changes to building operations, including the operation of heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems, can reduce airborne exposures.

ASHRAE’s position does not contradict the statements of WHO and CDC that most transmission probably occurs at short range. CDC notes that instances of community spread are not clearly cases of short-range transmission and recommends the use of engineering controls that capture or remove viral aerosols in some circumstances. WHO notes that it is investigating other modes of transmission and it, too, recommends the use of engineering/environmental controls in some circumstances. ASHRAE’s position that measures that reduce airborne concentrations of viral particles or droplets may reduce exposure and therefore risk of disease transmission is not fundamentally in conflict with these positions and recommendations.