

Guidance for Gatherings: Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies

JUNE 15, 2020 | STAY SAFE MN PHASE III

In order to host in-person services and related celebrations, all faith-based communities, places of worship, funeral homes, and other venues that may offer gathering space for weddings, funerals, worship services, rituals, prayer meetings, and scripture studies must develop and implement a [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](http://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/doc/COVID_19_business_plan_template.docx) (www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/doc/COVID_19_business_plan_template.docx).

- The Plan must be evaluated, monitored, executed, and updated under the supervision of a designated Plan Administrator within your organization or leadership structure. This includes a "church" as that term is used in the Internal Revenue Code.
- The Plan must be posted onsite in an easily accessible location so all leadership, staff, and volunteers can readily review it.

Regardless of the venue or gathering, all staff and participants should maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between households, cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands often, and stay home if sick.

Face coverings are strongly recommended whenever one is gathering or in a setting with others from outside their household. Face coverings help slow the spread of COVID-19 by helping to keep the person wearing the covering from infecting others. Evidence suggests that the virus causing COVID-19 can be spread by droplets released from the nose and throat of an infected person when they cough, sneeze, sing, speak, or breathe, even if the infected person is not showing symptoms. See [Facemasks and Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidance.html#ppe) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidance.html#ppe) and [CDC: Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).

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Large gatherings continue to present significant risk for increasing the spread of COVID-19. All faith communities are encouraged to provide remote services and choose **not** to open or host large gatherings. If there is evidence of COVID-19 spread within your faith community, you may be advised to stop offering in-person services until it is safe to return. Contact your local or state health department for further guidance in these situations.

This guidance applies to a variety of gathering spaces and is based on space size, predictability and flow of movement, duration of time in designated shared space, and the potential spread of COVID-19 at large gatherings, even when precautions are taken.

Gatherings in a place of worship or ceremonies such as a funeral or wedding

Occupancy must be reduced to allow for the required social distancing of at least 6 feet between people who do not live in the same household. For indoor worship settings, occupancy must not exceed 50% of total capacity, with a maximum of 250 people in a single self-contained space. In outdoor settings, gatherings must not exceed 250 people.

See the next section for more details and refer to the [Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-based communities, places of worship, weddings, and funerals \(mn.gov/deed/assets/worship-guidance-ACC_tcm1045-433301.pdf\)](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/worship-guidance-ACC_tcm1045-433301.pdf).

Gatherings for ceremonies or socializing in homes or private settings

Limit to 10 people or less indoors, 25 people or less outdoors.

Gatherings for receptions and other activities before and after ceremonies

- Gatherings taking place in indoor and outdoor venues such as event centers, faith-based buildings, community centers, rental halls, or at similar outdoor spaces and that are providing food and beverages for on-site consumption have a limit of indoor and outdoor occupant capacity of 25% up to 250 persons. A responsible party must be assigned to develop and implement a [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan \(www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/doc/COVID_19_business_plan_template.docx\)](https://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/doc/COVID_19_business_plan_template.docx). See the [Guidance for Providing Food and Beverages for On-site Consumption at Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/foodgather.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/foodgather.pdf) for more information.
- Gatherings at a restaurant that completes a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan can have up to 250 people depending upon the capacity size and capacity limitations.

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- Venues may provide live music if the setting allows for social distancing for musicians.
- Activities that generally involve close contact between persons, such as dancing, should be modified to safely increase physical distance between persons from different households.

For leaders, staff, and volunteers

Designate one person from your leadership team or staff to prepare the Plan and ensure that it is understood, publicly posted, and followed by everyone. The Plan must include procedures and instructions on how you will address the following:

1. Ensure that sick staff stay home. Staff at higher risk are encouraged to work from home.
2. Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between staff.
3. Practice good hygiene: cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands often, wear masks.
4. Ensure building safety and proper ventilation protocols.
5. Ensure safe practices and protocols for drop-off, pick-up, and deliveries.
6. Create and follow work and gathering space cleaning and disinfection protocols. Refer to [CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Home \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html).
7. Communicate and train all staff on these practices and protocols.
8. Ensure that all activities held in your building(s) follow your practices and protocols (support or community groups, distribution of essential items, etc.).
9. Communicate the steps being taken and the changes to services to all members and participants in order to participate safely and minimize the possible spread of COVID-19.
10. Ensure that you have enough cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and tissues. Post signs and instructions to: stay home if you are sick or at high risk, wash hands, cover your cough, wear a face mask, and keep the required 6 feet (2 meters) of social distance. Signage for printing is available on [Materials and Resources for COVID-19 Response \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html).

If there is evidence of COVID-19 spread associated with your faith community, you may be advised by your local or state health department to stop offering in-person services until it is safe to return.

For detailed guidance about building usage and ventilation information, including how to get your building ready to be used after extended closure, drop-off, pick-up, and delivery practices and protocols, cleaning and disinfection protocols, and more, see the [Stay Safe Guidance for Places of Worship \(https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp).

For faith community members and participants

Before the service or ceremony

- Stay home if you or anyone in your household is sick or has symptoms: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle aches, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell.
- Persons who are at higher risk for severe illness (elderly or underlying health conditions) are strongly encouraged to stay home.
- Participants should understand and agree to follow the COVID-19 Preparedness Plans for the facilities where the service or ceremony will take place.

During the service or ceremony

- Participants should regularly wash or sanitize their hands, cover coughs and sneezes, and wear a face mask (including any presider/leader).
- Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between people from different households at all times (entering, exiting, sitting, and any activities during the service).
- Singing/chanting is a higher risk activity, so congregations are strongly encouraged to have pre-recorded music/chants or listen to a cantor who maintains distance from other cantors and participants during the service.
- Do not touch items often touched by others if possible. Items that are touched should be sanitized between shared users and between services.
- Adapt all practices during the services to avoid close contact and maintain social distancing (greetings, collections, sharing of ceremonial objects, communion, etc.).
- Prayer that involves close facial contact to the floor or carpet should require people to bring their own rug, or provide a paper covering for one-time use and then disposal.

If there is evidence of COVID-19 spread associated with your faith community, you may be advised by your local or state health department to cancel or postpone in-person services until it is safe to return.

For detailed information, see the [Stay Safe Guidance for Places of Worship \(https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp).

Resources

From the State of Minnesota:

- [Community Settings: COVID-19](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html)
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html)
- [Guidance on Hosting Faith-Based Services in Parking Lots \(PDF\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidfaithpark.pdf)
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidfaithpark.pdf)
- [Guidance for Providing Food and Beverages for On-site Consumption at Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings \(PDF\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/foodgather.pdf) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/foodgather.pdf)
- [Guidance for Visiting People at Home \(PDF\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf)
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf)
- [Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-based communities, places of worship, weddings, and funerals](http://mn.gov/deed/assets/worship-guidance-ACC_tcm1045-433301.pdf) (mn.gov/deed/assets/worship-guidance-ACC_tcm1045-433301.pdf)
- [Stay Safe Guidance for Places of Worship](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp) (<https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp>)
- [Stay Safe Guidance for Businesses and Organizations](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp) (<https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp>)

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- [Community and Faith-Based Organizations](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html)
- [Checklist for Communities of Faith](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html)
- [Gatherings and Community Events](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html)
- [Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html)



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Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.

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