



# Chester County Health Department

Coronavirus COVID-19

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## Places of Worship and Religious Institutions Guidance

Updated: September 24, 2020

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#### **Purpose**

These sector specific COVID-19 safety standards for places of worship and religious institutions are issued to provide recommendations to help protect against the spread of COVID-19 as in-person services resume.

#### **Scope**

These standards apply to all places of worship and religious institutions, and all services and activities including regular and holiday services, weddings, funerals, and wakes.

#### **Education and Communication**

- Places of worship and religious institutions should educate staff and congregants about symptoms and prevention of COVID-19.
  - Communicate to members and workers that if they are feeling sick, are exhibiting any of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell), or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, then they should not attend services in-person.
  - A potential exposure means having household contact or having close contact (within 6 feet) with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (over 10 minutes) while the person is symptomatic or 48 hours before symptoms developed.
  - Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home.
- Post prominent signs at entrances and in staff break rooms (if applicable):
  - Asking people who are sick or who have had contact with someone with COVID-19 within the past 14 days not to enter.
  - Encouraging people to cover coughs or sneezes.
  - Mandating physical distancing of at least 6 feet.
  - Mandating that all staff and congregants wear masks.

#### **Screen**

- Screen every staff member for symptoms before every shift utilizing the Chester County Health Department's [COVID-19 Screening Guidance for Employers](#).



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#### Isolate

- Plan for when a staff member or congregant becomes sick
  - Maintain an attendance roster for all activities attended by staff and/or congregants in case it is needed for contact tracing. In the event that a staff member of congregant becomes COVID-19 positive, the individual will be contacted by the Health Department and encouraged to share a list of contacts with the Health Department for contract tracing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
  - Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
  - Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes [sick](#) at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
  - Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or other applicable laws and in accordance with religious practices.
  - Advise those with [exposure](#) to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to [stay home and self-monitor](#) for symptoms, and follow [CDC guidance](#) if symptoms develop.
  - Close off areas used by the [sick](#) person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection. Ensure [safe and correct application](#) of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Advise staff and congregants with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's [criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).
- Implement flexible sick leave and related flexible policies and practices for staff (e.g., allow work from home, if feasible), and provide requested reasonable accommodation absent undue hardship to individuals with disabilities under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) or other applicable laws and in accordance with religious practices.
- Monitor absenteeism and create a roster of trained back-up staff.
- Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Staff, clergy, volunteers, and congregants should know who this person is and how to contact them if they become sick or are around others diagnosed with COVID-19. This person should also be aware of state or local regulatory agency policies related to group gatherings.
- As volunteers often perform important duties (e.g., greeters, ushers, childcare), consider similar monitoring, planning, and training for them. Consider that volunteer and staffing may need to increase to implement cleaning and safety protocols and to accommodate additional services with reduced attendance.



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#### **Intensify Cleaning, Disinfection, and Ventilation**

- Places of worship and religious institutions should be cleaned and disinfected between each service or at least every 4 hours, including disinfection of heavy transit areas, high-touch surfaces, and shared objects (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments) See [CDC guidance](#) for details.
- Clean spaces and items used by staff or congregants between uses unless those items remain unused for at least 4 days between uses. Spaces that remain empty for at least 4 days do not require special cleaning.
- Develop a schedule of increased, routine cleaning and disinfection.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- If a place of worship or religious institution learns that an individual with COVID-19 attended a service or otherwise entered the place of worship or religious institution, it shall conduct a deep cleaning and disinfecting consistent with the [Centers for Disease Control guidance](#).

#### **Promote Healthy Hygiene Practices**

- Encourage staff and congregants to maintain good hand hygiene, [washing hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for those who can safely use hand sanitizer), tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
- Encourage staff and congregants to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed.
- Whenever soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used.
- Consider posting signs on how to [stop the spread](#) of COVID-19 and [how to promote everyday protective measures](#), such as washing hands, covering coughs and sneezes, and [properly wearing a face covering](#).

#### **Crowd Reductions**

- Places of worship and religious institutions are encouraged, to the extent feasible, to hold services virtually or outdoors and to ensure that attendees who are not from the same immediate household are spaced at least 6 feet apart.



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- If feasible, places of worship and religious institutions are encouraged to arrange online sign-up for services in advance in order to monitor and prevent overcrowding or turning congregates away.
- If possible, offer staggered service times to increase physical distancing.
- Continue to offer remote service options even after in-person services resume to offer a safe option to those at high risk and to allow for greater physical distancing of in-person attendees.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person and mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) including group gatherings of varying sizes. The Health Department does not currently provide recommendations on specific maximum numbers for indoor or outdoor gatherings. We do, however, strongly recommend that organizers of events and gatherings at indoor and outdoor venues ensure that key prevention measures are implemented - social distancing of 6 feet, access to handwashing/hand sanitizer, as well as requiring face coverings to reduce the risk of this virus spreading in group settings.

## **Promote Social Distancing**

### **General**

- Promote social distancing at services and other gatherings, ensuring that clergy, staff, choir, volunteers and attendees at the services follow social distancing, as circumstances and faith traditions allow, to lessen their risk.
- Use signage, floor decals, or other visual cues to encourage individuals/family groups to space themselves at least 6 feet from others.
- Separate service leader from the front row of congregants and from other service leaders by at least 20 feet (6 feet is likely to be inadequate because of vocal projection and/or singing).
- Consistent with the community's faith tradition, consider temporarily limiting the sharing of frequently touched objects, such as worship aids, prayer rugs, prayer books, hymnals, religious texts and other bulletins, books, or other items passed or shared among congregants, and encouraging congregants to bring their own such items, if possible, or photocopying or projecting prayers, songs, and texts using electronic means.

### **Seating**



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- Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.
- If there is fixed seating, rows of chairs or pews should be blocked off and kept empty so that congregants can only sit in every 3rd row to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.
- For gatherings where congregants pray on mats, separate mats by at least 6 feet or use other visual cues to congregants to separate.
- Promote ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible. For example, consider opening windows and doors to allow airflow.

### Entering and Exiting

- Use signage floor markings to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting the service.
- If a line forms outside of the service, those waiting should be directed to maintain social distancing. Tape, floor decals, or other markings on the ground outside of places of worship and religious institutions should be placed to encourage attendees to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Staff should direct people in high traffic areas to help maintain social distancing.
- Officiants or other staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting.
- Consider using contactless door openers to avoid having each person touch door handles.

### Face Coverings

- All attendees and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with the [Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings](#) inside and while entering and exiting places of worship, religious institutions, or otherwise participating in in-person services, except when a person meets the exceptions of identified in the Order. Additional information about the Order can be found at [Universal Face Coverings Order FAQ](#).
- An individual does not need to provide documentation that the individual fits within an exception to the Order.
- Places of worship and religious institutions may refuse entry to a person who refuses to wear a face covering or mask for non-medical reasons.



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#### **Worship/Singing**

- If it is customary to have the service leader or celebrant sing, place a clear plastic shield/barrier that extends well above the service leader's head between the service leader and the congregation.
- Do not allow choir practice or performance, or any group singing until public health authorities have given guidance on the safety of group singing.
- Ask that congregants NOT sing (see above). Humming (inside a mask) and clapping are safer ways for congregants to participate.

#### **Contributions and Communal Food, Drink, and Sacraments**

- Places of worship and religious institutions are encouraged to modify the means to collect any financial contributions from attendees so as to eliminate shared contribution trays and baskets and to minimize contact. Consider setting up a no-touch method to collect contributions, and encouraging contributions through mail or electronic means.
- Places of worship and religious institution are encouraged to modify communal rituals, such as taking communion or passing of the peace, so as to limit contact with others.
- Consider distributing, where applicable, prepackaged communion or sacraments.
- Food and drink should not be served or consumed at services or gatherings until further notice.
- Places of worship and religious institutions shall not have communal gathering pre- or post-service (e.g., coffee hours or other food services).
- Places of worship and religious institutions running food pantries or other prepackaged food distribution may continue to do so.

#### **Nursery/Childcare**

- If a nursery or childcare will be provided during services and events, refer to CDC's information on [preventing the spread of COVID-19 in childcare settings](#) and adapt as needed for your setting.
- If holding summer day camps, refer to CDC's information on [youth and summer camps](#) and adapt as needed.



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### **Supporting the Local Community**

Leaders should talk to staff and members about their concerns, as well as the potential fears and anxiety that may result from rumors or misinformation. Be sure to share resources that provide reliable COVID-19 information and speak out to prevent stigma and discrimination.

Consider how your organization is uniquely able to assist the local community. Congregations and organizations with experience working with underserved communities (e.g., people who are incarcerated, people who are experiencing homelessness, immigrants, refugees, those with limited English proficiency, single-parent families, public housing residents, migrant-, farm-, and other low-wage workers) can work with the Chester County Health Department and other community groups to ensure these groups receive appropriate care and services. Determine whether your organization can help ensure care and services for vulnerable populations, whether serving as central distribution sites for food, water, supplies, or medicine, a COVID-19 testing site, a vaccination site, or in another way.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **Stop the Spread of Germs 11x17 Poster**

- English: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs-11x17-en.pdf>
- Spanish: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs-11x17-sp.pdf>

#### **Preventative Actions to Help Protect Yourself and Others**

- Please Wear a Cloth Face Covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-covering-building-entrance.pdf>

#### **Wash Your Hands**

- English: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/wash-your-hands-poster-english-508.pdf>
- Spanish: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/wash-your-hands-poster-spanish-508.pdf>



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### **Kids, Camp, and Day Care Communication Resources**

- Handwashing is Your Superpower: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/superhero\\_poster.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/superhero_poster.pdf)
- Did You Wash Your Hands? <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-wash-hands-summer-camp-poster.pdf>
- Cover Coughs and Sneezes-Campers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-stop-germs-summer-camp-poster.pdf>
- Keep 6 feet of Space-Campers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-keep-space-summer-camp-poster.pdf>
- Camp Rules for COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-camp-rules-summer-camp-poster.pdf>
- Tell an Adult if You Feel Sick: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-dont-feel-well-summer-camp.pdf>

*For organizations that also maintain offices for operations, continue to adhere to the guidance for office settings.*

See also: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/covid-19/business-guidance/> and

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

- 1) [Order](#) of the Secretary of Health providing for building safety measures, issued April 5, 2020
- 2) [Order](#) of the Secretary of Health providing for business safety measures (to keep employees and customers safe), issued April 15, 2020