



COVID-19

CDC has updated its guidance for people who are fully vaccinated. See [Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People](#).

Considerations for Communities of Faith

Updated Feb. 19, 2021

[Print](#)

COVID-19 Cases are Extremely High. Avoid Events and Gatherings

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths [are extremely high across the United States](#). To decrease your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19, CDC recommends that you [do not gather with people who do not live with you](#) at this time. **Attending events and gatherings increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. Stay home to [protect yourself and others](#) from COVID-19.**

CDC offers the following general considerations to help communities of faith discern how best to practice their beliefs while keeping their staff and congregations safe. Millions of Americans embrace worship as an essential part of life. For many faith traditions, gathering together for worship is at the heart of what it means to be a community of faith. But as Americans are now aware, gatherings present a risk for increasing spread of COVID-19 during this Public Health Emergency. CDC offers these suggestions for faith communities to consider and accept, reject, or modify, consistent with their own faith traditions, in the course of preparing to reconvene for in-person gatherings while still working to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution or any other federal law, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). The federal government may not prescribe standards for interactions of faith communities in houses of worship, and in accordance with the First Amendment, no faith community should be asked to adopt any mitigation strategies that are more stringent than the mitigation strategies asked of similarly situated entities or activities.

In addition, we note that while many types of gatherings are important for civic and economic well-being, religious worship has particularly profound significance to communities and individuals, including as a right protected by the First Amendment. State and local authorities are reminded to take this vital right into account when establishing their own re-opening plans.

Scaling Up Operations

- Establish and maintain communication with local and State authorities to determine current mitigation levels in your community.
- Provide protections for staff and congregants at [higher risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19. Offer options for staff at [higher risk for severe illness](#) (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk. Offer options for congregants at [higher risk of severe illness](#) that limit their exposure risk (e.g., remote participation in services).
- Consistent with applicable federal and State laws and regulations, put in place policies that protect the privacy and confidentiality of people at [higher risk for severe illness](#) regarding underlying medical conditions.
- Encourage any organizations that share or use the facilities to also follow these considerations as applicable.
- If your community provides social services in the facility as part of its mission, consult CDC's information for [schools](#) and [businesses and workplaces](#), as relevant, for helpful information.

Safety Actions




Continue to take these steps to reduce your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19:

- Correctly and consistently [wear a mask](#) that completely covers your nose and mouth
- Stay [at least 6 feet away](#) from others who do not live with you
- [Avoid crowds](#)
- Avoid poorly [ventilated](#) indoor spaces
- [Stay home when you are sick](#)
- [Wash your hands](#) frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use [hand sanitizer](#) containing at least 60% alcohol)
- [Get vaccinated](#) when the vaccine is available to you
- [Get tested](#) if you have signs or [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, or if you think you may have been [exposed](#) to someone with COVID-19

Even if you and others (including [children](#)) do not feel sick and do not have any [symptoms](#), **you can still spread COVID-19 to family, friends, and community.**

Do NOT be around others if you have been [exposed](#) to someone with COVID-19, if you are [sick](#), or if you have [tested positive for COVID-19](#).

Promote [healthy hygiene practices](#)

- Encourage staff and congregants to maintain good hand hygiene, [washing hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Ensure you have accessible sinks and enough supplies for people to clean their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes. Supplies include soap, water, a way to dry hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer), tissues, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for those who can safely use hand sanitizer), and no-touch/foot pedal trash cans (preferably covered).
- 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](#)  [\[468 KB, 1 Page\]](#) of COVID-19 and how to [promote everyday protective measures](#)  [\[280 KB, 2 Pages\]](#), such as [washing hands](#), covering coughs and sneezes, and [properly wearing a mask](#)  .

Masks

- Encourage use of masks among staff and congregants. [Masks](#) are most essential when social distancing is difficult. Note: Masks should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. [Masks](#) offer some protection to the wearer and are also meant to protect those around the wearer, in case they are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

Regularly clean

When and how to clean surfaces and objects

Cleaning with a household cleaner that contains soap or detergent reduces the amount of germs on surfaces and objects and decreases risk of infection from surfaces. In most situations, [cleaning alone removes most virus particles on surfaces](#).

- Clean high-touch surfaces and objects regularly (for example, daily or after each use) and after you have visitors in your home.

- Focus on high-touch surfaces and objects (doorknobs, tables, handles, light switches, phones, remote controls, and countertops).
- Clean other surfaces in your home when they are visibly dirty or as needed. Clean them more frequently if people in your household are [more likely to get very sick from COVID-19](#). Disinfect [if certain conditions apply](#).
- Clean [surfaces](#) using a product suitable for each surface, following instructions on the product label.

When Someone Is Sick

If someone in your home is sick or someone who has COVID-19 has been in your home in the last 24 hours, [clean and disinfect your home](#). Disinfecting removes germs and reduces their spread.

For more information on cleaning and disinfecting safely, see [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Home](#).

Promote social distancing

- Take steps to limit the size of gatherings in accordance with the guidance and directives of state and local authorities and subject to the protections of the First Amendment and any other applicable federal law.
- 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.
- Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances and faith traditions allow.
- Consider appropriate mitigation measures, including taking steps to limit the size of gatherings maintaining [social distancing](#), at other gatherings such as funerals, weddings, religious education classes, youth events, support groups and any other programming, where consistent with the faith tradition.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or walkways and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).

Take steps to minimize community sharing of worship materials and other items

- 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.
- Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions. Consider a stationary collection box, the main, or electronic methods of collection regular financial contributions instead of shared collection trays or baskets.
- Consider whether physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, or kissing) can be limited among members of the faith community.
- If food is offered at any event, consider pre-packaged options, and avoid buffet or family-style meals if possible.

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.

Staffing and Training

- Train all clergy and staff in the above safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that [social distancing](#) is maintained.

Check for signs and symptoms

- Learn more about the [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- Encourage staff or congregants who are sick or who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 to stay home. Share CDC's criteria for staying home with staff and congregants so that they know how to care for themselves and others. Consider posting signs at entrances with this information.

Plan for when a staff member or congregant becomes sick

- 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](#).

Maintain healthy operations

- 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.
- Communicate clearly with staff and congregants about actions being taken to protect their health.

Signs and Messages

- Post [signs](#) in highly visible locations (e.g., entrances, restrooms, gathering halls/community rooms/gyms) that [promote everyday protective measures](#) [📄 \[280 KB, 2 Pages\]](#) and describe how to [stop the spread](#) [📄 \[468 KB, 1 Page\]](#) of germs (such as by [properly washing hands](#) and [properly wearing a mask](#) [👤](#)).
- Include messages (for example, [videos](#)) about behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with staff and congregants (such as in emails and on community websites and [social media accounts](#)).
- Find freely available CDC print and digital resources on CDC's [communications resources](#) main page.

Closing

- Check [state](#) and [local](#) [↗](#) health department notices daily about transmission in the community and adjust operations.

- In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the community, it is strongly suggested to dismiss attendees, then properly clean and disinfect the area and the building where the individual was present before resuming activities.

Last Updated Feb. 19, 2021