



Churches and Places of Worship

Churches and faith organizations should seriously consider not resuming traditional service inside. As an alternative, hold outside services or host services online. Public parks are available for free during this time to hold services. If church services are held inside, consider limiting the service to 10 congregates.

Although not required under the Governor's order, churches and faith organizations should require congregates to wear masks while in attendance.

Some considerations:

Identify a point person and form a response team now. Church leaders should assign a staff leader or trusted volunteer now to take the lead in gathering information and tracking updates about COVID-19. This person also should lead a response team preferably consisting of one member of the pastoral team, a custodian or maintenance team member, a finance committee member, a communications/website team member, and a local health care professional. This team should form now and meet soon to assess the current situation and plan steps to implement the preventive measures and response plans discussed here.

Establish clear congregational communication. Post signs and flyers encouraging hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette at entrances, in hallways, and in restrooms. Put announcements in print bulletins, e-newsletters, and on social media and websites with regular updates regarding changes in scheduled gatherings. Consider adding a page on the church website for frequently asked questions to keep members apprised.

Adjust worship practices and gatherings. Should conditions warrant (for instance, COVID-19 is reported in your state or local community), make changes to common church practices: Suspend "passing the peace" or greeting with handshakes during worship; consider single-serve communion, rather than common cups; and minimize food preparation and serving during coffee hours. Depending on the severity of an outbreak, your church may need to cancel programming, small-group gatherings, or even worship services. Should your local or state health officials or a federal agency warn against public gatherings or advise congregations (or your congregation specifically) not to meet, take such advice seriously. Follow the guidelines and instructions provided.

Workplace practices. Revisit policies on sick leave and absences, including mandatory paid leave in the event of a local outbreak. Employers should require individuals to be symptom-free before returning to work. This includes an orally taken temperature of less than 100.4 degrees for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication), and preferably includes completing a CDC self-assessment and consulting with a local physician. Leave should also be allowed for those who must care for sick family members.

In addition, in the event of a local outbreak, determine whether flexible work hours are possible for the church office to minimize the number of people in contact with each other throughout the day. Also consider instituting remote-work arrangements if the information technology and infrastructure can support it.