



Monongalia County Health Department

(304) 598-5100

COVID-19 Recommendations for Religious Gatherings

The Monongalia County Health Department (MCHD) offers the following general recommendations to assist religious congregations and communities of faith with reopening, in a manner that protects their members from COVID-19.

This guidance was compiled from a variety of sources, including the CDC's *Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith*, and *West Virginia Strong – Guidance for Religious Entities and Funeral Homes*. This guidance serves as a recommendation and not a requirement.

Safety Actions

- MCHD recommends that religious congregations require their members to wear masks or cloth face coverings at all times, even while practicing social distancing.

(Note that cloth face coverings 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 cloth face covering without assistance).

- Offer options for congregants at higher risk* of severe illness to limit their exposure risks, such as offering remote services. (* **Over 65, heart disease, diabetes, chronic lungs disease, immunocompromised**)
- Instruct staff and congregants to stay home if they feel ill or display any symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, etc).
- Encourage staff and congregants to practice good hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and water is not available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used.
- Encourage staff and congregants to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should immediately be thrown in the trash and hands washed.
 - Follow this guidance even if wearing a mask, as the force of a cough or sneeze could send infected droplets through a mask.
- Consider posting signs promoting the use of face masks and everyday hand washing.
- Provide tissues and hand sanitizer in areas throughout the campus.
- Provide hand sanitizer at all entrances used by staff and congregants.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily using an EPA-approved cleaner.
- Consider offering multiple services to ensure adequate social distancing. Also consider planning enough time between services to allow for cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces between services.
- Ensure that all staff and congregants practice adequate (6 foot) social distancing, as circumstances and faith tradition allow.
 - Members of the same family group and people that live in the same household can sit closer together.
- Consider suspending group-sings and choir services.

- Singing generates more droplets than most other activities. Due to increased exhalation during singing, these droplets may penetrate a mask and travel further than 6 feet.
- Evidence: In March, 53 of 122 people in attendance were infected after attending a choir practice in Mount Vernon, Washington.
- As an alternative, consider having a soloist sing from behind a plexiglass divider.
- Clergy should consider speaking from behind a plexiglass divider.
 - This would allow clergy to speak without wearing a mask, which can make it difficult to be understood by congregates who rely on lip-reading to understand others.
- Consider increasing ventilation by consulting with HVAC professionals, using large fans, and leaving doors and windows open.
 - Consult an HVAC professional to increase air exchange, switch filters to the highest applicable MERV rating, and effectively utilize UVC treatment options
- 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 or electronic methods of collecting regular financial contributions instead of shared collection trays.
- Consider taking communion from individual cups. Provide bread to congregants with gloves and tongs or in individual containers.
- Consider whether physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, or kissing) can be limited among members of the faith community.
- Consider closing water fountains and covering with a trash bag to prevent attempted use.
- 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.
- Train all clergy and staff in the above safety actions. Consider conducting this training virtually.

Monitoring and Preparing

- Consider keeping records of who attends services and how to contact them. This will help MCHD with contact tracing if a congregant tests positive for COVID-19.
- Consider allowing congregants to register their attendance using a Google Form or a text messaging service such as Remind 101.
 - If Remind 101 is used, consider having congregants' text the code to join a new "class" during each service. Name the class as the date and time of the service.
- Consider adding signs indicating row and seat numbers. Allow congregants to report their row and seat number via a Google Form or via a text service.
- MCHD will only ask for this information if a congregant tests positive for COVID-19.
- 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.

Helpful Links

CDC Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

CDC Guidance for Child Care Programs

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>

CDC Suggestions for Youth and Summer Camps

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html>

CDC Handwashing Posters

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html>

CDC Stop the Spread Poster

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

EPA List of Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19#filter_col1