

Health Ministries

Hoag Health Ministries has developed some guidelines for reopening spaces of worship for your convenience. Recommendations are rapidly evolving across the County, and these guidelines are designed to be a guide for you and your congregation. We hope that you find these guidelines helpful to meet the unique needs of your congregation. Thank you to the volunteer Faith Community Nurses who helped contribute to the creation of these recommendations.

Steps to Plan, Prepare, and Proceed for Reopening Spaces of Worship

First plan and prepare with staff and volunteers via zoom (or other virtual tools) to ensure they are trained to facilitate the reopening of the space, but also to ensure that they are protecting their own safety and health:

1. Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions. Use [health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources such as CDC](#) or your local public health department to encourage your staff and participants to practice good personal health habits. Consider displaying signs (physical and/or electronic) throughout the church/mosque/synagogue to provide frequent reminders to participants to engage in [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These include:

Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.

Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

[Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.](#)

2. Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to staff and volunteers. Ensure that you have supplies for staff and volunteers, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, facemasks, and cleaners and disinfectants. Develop a routine to clean frequently touched office space surfaces and objects with detergent and water prior to disinfection, especially surfaces that are visibly dirty.

Health Ministries

-Ensure that staff and volunteers know how to properly use a facemask.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3XSeiYf_Q

3. Plan for staff absences. Develop and implement flexible attendance and sick-leave policies.

Event staff need to stay home when they are sick, or they may need to stay home to care for a sick household member or care for their children in the event of school dismissals. Allow staff to work from home when possible.

4. Consider alternatives for staff and volunteers who are at increased risk for complications from COVID-19. Currently, [those adults that are 65+ years old and persons with severe underlying health conditions](#) are considered to be at increased risk for severe illness and complications from COVID-19. Organizers can consider reassigning duties for higher-risk staff and volunteers to have minimal contact with other persons.

5. Plan ways to limit in-person contact for staff supporting your events. Several ways to do this include offering staff the option to telework if they can perform their job duties off-site, using email, and conducting meetings by phone or video conferencing. Reduce the number of staff needed such as staggering shifts for staff who support essential functions and services during events.

6. Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel meetings/events. Work closely with local public health officials to assess local capacities in the area. During a COVID-19 outbreak, resource limitations among local healthcare systems and/or law enforcement can influence the decision to postpone or cancel certain events and/or meetings.

7. Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Get [up-to-date information](#) about local COVID-19 activity from public health officials. Be aware of temporary school dismissals in your area because these may affect event staff.

8. Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information. Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, event staff, participants, suppliers, vendors, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information. Update key community partners and stakeholders regularly. Share information about how you and the emergency operations coordinator or planning team are responding to the outbreak.

Health Ministries

Prepare Your Space of Worship

Deep clean your entire church/mosque/synagogue. Where will germs be transferred? Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, upholstery furniture, and microphones. (develop a schedule for cleaning). [Does this give rise to a new team of people on campus whose ministry it is to walk around wiping doorknobs and other surfaces? Who is going to clean restrooms throughout the morning or evening?](#)

Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed and allow for the proper dry times. [Here is a list of approved disinfectants for COVID-19.](#)

Pay attention to the preschool and children's areas. Consider removing everything nonessential from the room to limit surfaces for potential contamination and do a thorough cleaning in between uses. Please see the preschool/children section for more information to consider.

Temporarily remove Bibles, hymnals, pens, information cards, etc., from the backs of chairs/pews.

Post signs about not shaking hands and doing non-contact greetings. It's ok to smile and wave.

Consider placing some kind of blocks in your sanctuary or classrooms to ensure social distancing. Tape, remove chairs, use cones, etc. to indicate the distance needed.

Tell your congregation through flyers on the doors, email, and social media about how you've prepared the church/mosque/synagogue for their arrival. This could include electronic messages sent to attendees prior to worship. Also say that if they are sick, then they should not be present and can join online instead.

Service Times and Location

Keep an online meeting option for those who are afraid or unable to attend your service in person.

You can offer multiple services to encourage a greater chance of social distancing. One way to ensure your services are evenly spread is to have people sign up for a service. You can use Facebook or another online program to have people mark which service they'll attend. [\(what online platforms are available for parishioners to use?\)](#)

Health Ministries

Remember that if you have multiple services, you will need to clean between each service. You can shorten the service time to help with the timing of cleaning thoroughly. Some churches are moving to having multiple services during the week to allow for cleaning in between service times.

Determine how many volunteers you have available to assist. Limit volunteers to those who do not have preexisting conditions and those who are under 65 years old.

Worship Services

Celebrate the return!

If your people are from the same household, they can sit together, otherwise consider spacing out other groups. Infants and children should always remain with their parents or guardians. See the preparation section.

Remember to avoid handing out bulletins, and instead project announcements on screens. Also do not allow people to come by and pick up bulletins out of stacks. Consider placing bulletins on the pews or chairs but ask the people to take bulletins home with them.

Change the way you offer communion. Avoid passing a plate or bowl.

Avoid passing microphones on the stage.

Continue offering online giving options. Have specific stations where people can drop offerings instead of passing a plate.

Come up with a fun way to greet others in a no-contact way. Handshakes can be ways in which COVID-19 can be transmitted from person to person. As a way of decreasing the social pressure to engage in this common behavior, consider displaying signs (physical and/or electronic) that discourage handshakes and encourage alternative ways to greet one another ([what signage needs to be developed?](#))

Clean the pulpit after every use.

Consider dismissing in an orderly way to ensure there is social distancing. Plan for entering and exiting the building must be developed (one entrance, dismiss by rows.)

Health Ministries

Amenities: Coffee, Bulletins, and Hand Sanitizer

Restrooms: You must decide whether you will allow bathroom usage at this time. If you don't think you can allow it, then it may not be time to return to the building.

Do not hand out bulletins. Do not allow people to come by and pick them up out of stacks.

We recommend withholding coffee stations, donuts, or groups meals at this time. You can stay attuned to the guidelines to know when is best to reintroduce these services.

If you choose to keep your restrooms open, be sure to post signs about washing hands in bathrooms with appropriate guidelines to doing so.

Display hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content throughout the church. It may be difficult to obtain at this point, so consider if you should meet in person without this element.

Supply masks for those without one to increase comfort levels. ([does your congregation have resources to distribute masks to the congregation when needed?](#))

Staff: Greeters and Volunteers

Provide security and enlist ushers to be both inside and outside greeters. Instruct them on how to greet post-quarantine: NO hand shaking or hugs.

Ensure doors are propped open or have the greeters hold them open.

Greeters and Volunteers should be able to answer questions on procedures and policies upon the return to the building. Train them beforehand if possible.

If your bathrooms are open, have greeters monitor the bathrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.

Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers. If one's temperature is over 100.4 °F, have them go home & call their health care provider.

Health Ministries

Sunday School and Small Groups

Consider whether you will have Sunday school or small groups (see previous point). Make sure you're communicating if and when these classes will resume.

Consider dividing your groups to maintain the social distancing standards. You can also allow small groups to use the church on different days/nights if you choose to meet in person.

If you do have class, please know you should clean the doorknobs, water fountains, and other high traffic areas in between uses.

If you don't have class, make sure you have provided an outline for your teachers and leaders to continue engagement for your groups with virtual resources. This is still an excellent time to build classes and community.

Choirs, Orchestras, Bands, etc.

Choir: Consider suspending choir practices as forceful breathing and exhaling can expel the virus further if someone is infected. However, you could consider using smaller numbers as you reintroduce choir to the service. Also, space members out appropriately (consider using a diamond pattern with six feet of spacing between members).

Temporarily suspend using hymnals. Encourage your members to print/use their own music sheets or place the music in assigned seating prior to the service.

Orchestras: Keep parts to a minimum and ensure the orchestras are spaced appropriately. Encourage brass players to bring their own towel to catch spit so it doesn't land on the carpet.

Consider not using choir robes as space for robe changing may be limited. Just as healthcare workers change or wash their coats after each use, so should the robes be dry cleaned and stored in the bags from the cleaners.

Wipe down music stands after each use.

Dismiss the choir in a fashion to allow distancing.

Health Ministries

Tech Teams

Clean microphones, headphones, computers, laptops, etc. after every use. Keep a record of when each item was cleaned. DO NOT use water. Rubbing alcohol or alcohol-based cleaners are best.

Rotate your tech team if possible. Again, encourage those who feel sick or run down to not come into the service.

Keep using the online services.

If you don't have media support for announcements or singing, then print texts and place them in the pews/chairs. Encourage people to take the bulletins/music sheets home with them and not leave them in the pews.

BAPTISMS/WEDDINGS/FUNERALS

Will your church/mosque/synagogue continue to host weddings? How about funerals? Baptisms? Which ones will continue, and which ones will be put on hold? And how will you explain which ones continue and which ones don't?

References

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