

Guidance for Gatherings: Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies

UPDATED 11/10/20

Updates include addition of a link to the updated “Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events”; updates to the requirements for “Leaders, Staff, and Volunteers” section on page 3; information about Executive Order (EO) 20-96 on page 4 which limits the size of social gatherings.

Your health and COVID-19

Any time people are gathering with other people, they are at risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. People with symptoms and without symptoms can spread the virus.

COVID-19 can lead to serious medical conditions and even death for people of all ages. We cannot predict who will become severely ill, although we know that older people and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk. We do not yet know what the long-term effects of infection from COVID-19 are; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The masking, physical distancing, and other steps provided reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, but do not eliminate the risk entirely. We can all take these actions to protect ourselves, our families, and others throughout our communities:

- Stay home when sick.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from other people.
- Wear face coverings in indoor businesses and public indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.

About this guidance

This guidance is for planning or hosting in-person services and ceremonies in faith-based communities, places of worship, funeral homes, and other venues that may offer gathering space for weddings, funerals, worship services, rituals, prayer meetings, scripture studies, or similar activities.

Large and small gatherings continue to present significant risk for increasing the spread of COVID-19. All faith communities are encouraged to provide remote services for those members and guests who are at higher risk due to age or underlying health condition and are advised not to attend in-person gatherings.

This guidance is based on space size, predictability and flow of movement, duration of time in designated shared space, and the potential spread of COVID-19 when people gather, even when precautions are taken.

Requirements

- ✓ **Preparedness Plan:** All businesses, organizations, and venues where gatherings take place are required to develop and implement an event specific COVID-19 Preparedness Plan in accordance with the guidance below, and other applicable guidance on the [Stay Safe Minnesota website \(staysafe.mn.gov\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov). This plan must be displayed prominently, so any persons on the premises can easily see this document. Vendors servicing one event may collectively agree to one comprehensive plan, if they so choose.
 - ✓ **Social Distancing:** Occupancy must be reduced to allow for the required social distancing of at least 6 feet between people who do not live in the same household at all times.
 - ✓ **Masks and face coverings:** As of July 25, 2020, people in Minnesota are required to wear a face covering in all indoor businesses and public indoor spaces, per Executive Order 20-81. The Executive Order includes exemptions for people who are unable to wear or tolerate a face covering due to medical or mental health conditions or other reasons. There are also situations in which a face covering may be temporarily removed, such as when eating or drinking, provided that social distancing is maintained between members of different parties and the face covering is put back on when not eating or drinking. Businesses and venues may choose to have more protective requirements than those in the Executive Order. For more information about the Executive Order and face covering requirements, see [Masks and Face Coverings \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks\)](https://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks).
 - ✓ **Practice good hygiene:** Ensure handwashing facilities and/or hand sanitizer and tissues are available for people to use, and are placed in easily accessible locations.
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For leaders, staff, and volunteers

Designate one person from your leadership team or staff to prepare the Plan and ensure that it is understood, publicly posted, and followed by everyone. The Plan must include procedures and instructions on how you will address the following. Detailed information on all of the Preparedness Plan

Requirements Guidance for Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals can be found at [Stay Safe Minnesota website \(staysafe.mn.gov\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov).

Requirements

1. Implement a health screening protocol to ensure that sick staff stay home. Staff at higher risk are encouraged to work from home.
2. Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between staff and mandate face coverings at all times indoors.
3. Wear face coverings or mask, cover coughs and sneezes, and wash hands often.
4. Provide controlled flow of participants as much as possible to avoid congestion points, including upon start and at end of the event.
5. Limit the number of speakers to the smallest number possible and make arrangements so that they avoid close contact (e.g., within 6 feet) with others. Whenever possible, provide individual microphones for multiple speakers. If a microphone must be shared, consider cleaning between speakers or leaving it untouched on a stand.
6. Ensure building safety and proper ventilation protocols. For more details see: [Operational Guidance for Places of Worship \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp).
7. Ensure safe practices and protocols for drop-off, pick-up, and deliveries.
8. Create and follow work and gathering space cleaning and disinfection protocols. Refer to [CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Home \(cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html).
9. Communicate and train all staff on these practices and protocols.
10. Ensure that all activities held in your building(s) follow your practices and protocols (support or community groups, distribution of essential items, etc.).
11. Communicate the steps being taken and the changes to services to all members and participants in order to participate safely and minimize the possible spread of COVID-19.
12. Post signs and instructions to: stay home if you are sick or at high risk, wash hands, cover your cough, wear a facemask, and keep the required 6 feet of social distance. Signage for printing is available at [Materials and Resources for COVID-19 Response \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html\)](https://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html).

For faith community members and participants

Requirements

- Stay home if you or anyone in your household is sick or has symptoms: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle aches, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell. Stay home if you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

GUIDANCE FOR GATHERINGS: FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES, PLACES OF WORSHIP, AND CEREMONIES

- Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between people from different households at all times (entering, exiting, sitting, and any activities during the service).
- Wear a face covering or mask in compliance with Executive Order 20-81, (see [Face Covering Requirements under Executive Order 20-81](#) [www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html]), regularly wash or sanitize hands, and cover coughs and sneezes.

Recommendations

- Persons who are at higher risk for severe illness (elderly or underlying health conditions) are strongly encouraged to stay home.
- Participants should understand and agree to follow the COVID-19 Preparedness Plans for the facilities where the service or ceremony will take place.
- Singing/chanting is a higher risk activity, so congregations are strongly encouraged to have pre-recorded music/chants or listen to a cantor who maintains distance from other cantors and participants during the service. See also: [Music Activities and Performances During COVID-19](#) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf).
- Avoid touching items often touched by others if possible. Sanitize high-touch items between multiple users and between services.
- Adapt all practices during the services to avoid close contact and maintain social distancing (greetings, collections, sharing of ceremonial objects and prayer rugs, communion, etc.).
- Event photography: Standing close together is a high-risk activity, even when it is a shorter period of time. Consider taking individual photos and using editing software to combine them into a group photo. See additional recommendations in the [Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals](#) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefaith.pdf).

If there is evidence of COVID-19 spread associated with your faith community, you may be advised by your local or state health department to cancel or postpone in-person services until it is safe to return.

Gatherings for parties, celebrations, receptions, or other social gatherings connected to private parties before or after ceremonies

Venues that host planned celebrations or other social gatherings connected to private parties for holidays, weddings, funerals, life milestones (such as birthdays, anniversaries, or retirements), family reunions, planned religious services, and other similar occasions must develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan in accordance with applicable venue guidance available at the Stay Safe Minnesota website. See the [Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events](#) (health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf) for more information.

Gatherings for fellowship in homes or private settings

Social gatherings are limited in EO 20-96. EO 20-96 limits gatherings to no more than ten people indoors or outdoors and not more than three separate households.

Resources

From the State of Minnesota:

- [Preparedness Plan Requirements for Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.pdf)
- [Community Settings: COVID-19 \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html\)](http://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html)
- [Guidance for Vehicle Gatherings, Parades, and Drive-ins \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vehiclegather.pdf\)](http://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vehiclegather.pdf)
- [Guidance for Caring for People in Their Homes \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf\)](http://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf)
- [Operational Guidance for Places of Worship \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp\)](http://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp)
- [Stay Safe Guidance for Businesses and Organizations \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](http://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp)

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- [Community and Faith-Based Organizations \(cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html\)](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html)
- [Considerations for Communities of Faith \(cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html\)](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html)
- [Gatherings and Community Events \(cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html\)](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html)
- [Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families \(cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html\)](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html)



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Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.