



COVID-19: Religious institution reopening guidelines and best practices

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused religious institution facilities to temporarily shut down and congregations to alter their ways of worship and the practicing their faith. Going forward, religious institutions may have to restructure in-person gatherings and implement new protocols to keep their worship leaders and congregations safe.

As state and local governments implement their return-to-work plans and communities resume operations, religious organizations will need to take into account the ever-changing orders, recommendations and guidance from their state and local authorities.

There is no single best approach to reopening. The following are some best practices that may help you reopen and/or continue towards normal operations, while protecting your employees and congregations.

- Monitor local, state, and federal public health communications and ensure compliance with industry and location specific requirements.
- Deep clean your entire facility. Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing seats, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches and microphones.
- Encourage congregants to stay home if they are symptomatic or are sick. Refer to CDC guidance on symptoms at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>
- Place posters that encourage hand hygiene to help stop the spread at the entrance to your facility and in other areas where they are likely to be seen. Provide hand sanitizers and no-touch disposal receptacles at entrances and exits.
- Develop a screening process or health assessment for employees, when feasible (verbal screen, temperature readings, testing, personal protective equipment checks, etc.).
- Encourage use of cloth face coverings among staff and congregants.
- Promote social distancing practices at services and other gatherings, ensuring clergy, staff, choir, volunteers and attendees at services follow distancing guidelines of at least 6 feet apart.
- Redesign, realign, or reposition worship areas to ensure social distancing. If not feasible, install Plexiglas shields, dividers, or similar physical barriers between areas within the sanctuary.
- Take steps to limit the size of gatherings to ensure maintenance of social distancing.
- Use physical guides such as tape on floors and walkways and signs on doors and walls to ensure social distancing of at least 6 feet and provide one-way routes in sanctuaries and hallways.
- Consider holding services and gatherings in large ventilated areas, or outdoors.
- Limit the sharing of frequently touched objects, such as worship aids, prayer books, hymnals, bulletins, books or other shared items, and encourage congregants to bring their own such items.
- Consider a stationary collection box for financial contributions instead of shared collections trays or baskets, and encourage electronic means of contributions where available.
- Limit shaking of hands, hugging or kissing or any other physical contact.

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- Consider using prepackaged communion sets. Individual sets can be picked up from tables as people enter the sanctuary and used at the appropriate time in the service.
- Limit the use of each microphone to one individual. Sanitize microphones after using.
- Continue to provide virtual, online services and discipleship where available. Strongly encourage older members, those with vulnerable health conditions, and smaller children to worship online, until the final, “all green” stage of the pandemic.
- If your faith community offers multiple services, consider scheduling services far enough apart to allow time for cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces between services. Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaires’ disease and other diseases associated with water.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CDC Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith at

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

OSHA COVID-19 Overview, news and updates, hazard recognition, standards, medical information, and control and prevention.

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19:

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website for additional cleaning solutions:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>.

CDC Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

EPA-approved products for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available at

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>.

CDC hand hygiene guidelines

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

CDC Help Stop the Spread

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

CDC offers the following considerations for ways in which youth program administrators can help protect children, staff, and communities and slow the spread of COVID-19. Encourage students and staff to take protective actions to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html?deliveryName=USCDC_964-DM30121

Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open No matter the level of transmission in a community, every child care program should have a plan in place to protect staff, children, and their families from the spread of COVID-19. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html?deliveryName=USCDC_964-DM30121

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