

## **A Word of Encouragement and Diocesan Guidelines for Parishes During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Acknowledging the importance of people being able to once again worship together in their faith communities, both the federal and state governments have (with certain restrictions) lifted the ban on public worship services. As a result, after consulting with the clergy and many of the lay leaders of the Diocese, as well as a great deal of thought, prayer and research, I have authorized the reopening of church buildings throughout the Diocese of Albany provided certain diocesan guidelines are followed during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Before outlining the diocesan guidelines, I would like to take just a moment to talk about potential pastoral concerns associated with reopening our Church buildings. First, given the current NY State restriction limiting group gatherings inside church buildings to 10 persons or less (regardless of the size of the building), it is important for parishes to be pastorally sensitive as they devise a plan for public services constricted by the 10 person limit. With the possible exception of our smallest parishes, not everyone will be able to worship together at one time, so multiple services may be needed on Sunday, or spread throughout the week. The challenge will be coming up with an equitable system that allows those who want to attend Church to do so.

Parishes may want to investigate the website ([setmore.com](http://setmore.com)) to assist them with scheduling people for their church services. Hopefully the 10 person limit for indoor services will be lifted soon. Until then, however, especially during the warmer months, parishes may want to consider doing an outdoor service, which requires social distancing, but is not constrained by the 10 person rule, thus allowing for more people.

A second pastoral concern (apart from the 10 person limit) has to do with the fact that not everyone is in the same place, or has the same understanding of how best to move forward with public worship services during the Coronavirus Pandemic. I know many of us are anxious to get back to church as quickly as possible, while others of us are not yet ready to physically join in public worship. Please know that whichever group you find yourself in is fine.

No one should feel pressured to return to Church before they are ready, nor should those who want to return right away be seen as uncaring or unconcerned about spreading the Coronavirus. There are safe ways for us to come back to church if we work together. We each have different physical, mental and spiritual needs, all of which are important and need to be met as best we can, given the environment we find ourselves in and the various governmental restrictions we are faced with. May God give each of us the patience and grace we need to show Christian love and charity to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of one's views concerning when and how to reopen our churches. We cannot afford to allow the coronavirus to divide us.

Similarly, not all parishes are in the same place regarding when and how they (as a parish) should reopen. The fact that a parish may reopen its doors for public worship, does not mean

that it must reopen at this time. There may be parishes in the Diocese whose clergy and lay leaders decide not to reopen their buildings right away given the ongoing potential threat from the Coronavirus and the governmental regulations and diocesan guidelines. They may choose to wait until things calm down a bit more and some of the current restrictions are lifted. The clergy, wardens and vestry in each parish will need to work together in deciding whether this is the time to reopen, or whether to wait. Please inform the Bishop's office of whatever decision is made.

For those parishes that are ready to begin preparing to reopen, a set of diocesan guidelines has been established to help ensure that we provide as safe an environment as reasonably possible for our parishioners and visitors to come together to worship and serve God. While the basic guidelines set forth by the Diocese must be followed by all parishes, individual parishes may choose to add additional parish guidelines to meet their unique circumstances. With that said, no matter how hard we try, there is no way to guarantee 100% that someone might not be exposed to the coronavirus while at church. It is important that we trust God and do our best to provide both a safe environment as well as a meaningful ministry and worship experience for those entrusted to our care.

One of our greatest defenses against the coronavirus is to understand how it spreads. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the coronavirus' primary mode of transmission is believed to be through the aerosolization of respiratory droplets spread from an infected person to others in close contact around them, by sneezing, coughing, singing, or talking at close range. It is for that reason that the government recommends and in certain situations mandates that masks be worn when in public. The purpose of the mask is not so much to filter the air we are breathing, but rather to keep infected people from spewing droplets into the air around them.

While there are a few exceptions such as when someone sneezes or coughs, in most cases aerosolized droplets will not travel more than a few feet before dropping to the ground. Unfortunately in a heavily congested area, that is more than enough space for an infected person to contaminate those around them. That is why social distancing is so important during this pandemic. The CDC recommends keeping a distance of at least six feet from others outside one's home and immediate family.

According to the CDC website, while aerosolized droplets are the primary source of transmission, people can become infected through other means such as "touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. As a precaution, the CDC recommends regularly cleaning and sanitizing common areas frequented by others as well as practicing good hygiene by thoroughly washing one's hands or using hand sanitizers. Scientific studies have shown that in an ideal situation, COVID-19 can survive on metal or other hard surfaces for up to 72 hours, and for up to 24 hours on cardboard or other porous surfaces.

The diocesan guidelines for the reopening of churches (outlined below), are based primarily on recommendations from the CDC as well as government mandated regulations. They outline the basics of what is needed during this pandemic to help keep our parishioners and visitors safe

while worshipping and serving God in our parishes. Each parish has the responsibility of implementing them in the way that best meets the needs and circumstances of the parish. This is not the sole responsibility of the clergy, but rather the whole parish working together.

It is my hope and prayer that in the not too distant future, the potential threat from the coronavirus will be significantly reduced and we can then ease up, if not totally eliminate many of the following guidelines. For the time being, however, it is important that we follow them, not so much out of a sense of obligation, but rather as an act of love for one another. As Jesus so perfectly demonstrated on the cross, one's love for others, often requires sacrifices on our part.

The personal sacrifices or inconveniences we endure during the Coronavirus Pandemic, may very well be the thing that not only protects ourselves, but even more importantly our loved ones from contracting COVID-19. As stated by the CDC, "The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus." The following diocesan guidelines will help us in that quest. Everyone's cooperation in fighting the coronavirus as we come back together in our home parishes is greatly appreciated and needed. By the grace and mercy of God, and everyone's hard work, we will get through this.

## **Guidelines to be Followed by All Churches in the Diocese of Albany During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

- 1) Attitude is important. COVID-19 needs to be taken seriously, but we don't need to live in fear. To the degree possible, we need to be proactive, rather than reactive to the coronavirus. Plan ahead.
- 2) At all times when gathering for worship, or carrying out ministry within the Church during the pandemic, keep in mind how the coronavirus spreads and take appropriate precautions to guard against becoming infected or possibly infecting others.
- 3) Clear, respectful signs informing people of the expectation and requirement of wearing masks, social distancing, and the use of hand sanitizer (all outlined below), as well as other necessary instructions, need to be posted near all entrance doors of the Church and other prominent locations.
- 4) If people (to include the clergy) are not feeling well, running a fever, coughing, etc., or have been in contact with someone known to have the coronavirus (even if not showing symptoms), they should not attend Church, until they are well, or have completed self-quarantine. This is for their sake and everyone else's.
- 5) The following sign or something similar will be posted by each entrance door to the Church or worship area:

**ATTENTION:**

**Dear Friends, If you answer YES to any of the following, we ask that you NOT Attend Church today:**

- **Have a temperature of 100.4 or higher**
- **Lost your sense of taste or smell**
- **You or someone in your household has tested positive for COVID-19**
- **Have come in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19**

**Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.**

**The health and wellbeing of everyone is dependent on it.**

**May The Lord Bless You and Keep You Safe!**

- 6) All inside services must abide by the current government mandated group size of 10 people or less per service. Multiple services are authorized, provided the worship space is cleaned properly between services, or seating is alternated to avoid potential cross contamination between one service and the other. Please note that the current mandated group size may be changed by the government with little to no warning. We will need to adjust accordingly. God willing, the 10 person limit will be lifted soon.
- 7) Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting agents (for the surface being cleaned) will be used. Common areas such as bathrooms as well as often touched items such as door knobs, light switches, handrails, etc...need to be cleaned on a regular basis. The NYS Dept. of Health or CDC websites can provide some guidance.
- 8) All inside services must provide adequate space for safe social distancing of at least six feet between individuals or family groups.
- 9) Outside services to include lawn and parking lot services may be held. Larger groups than 10 are authorized, provided each individual or family group maintains safe social distancing of at least 6 feet or more from one another. Parked cars must be six feet from one another if people are sitting in them with windows rolled down for the service.
- 10) The congregation for both indoor and outdoor services must wear masks. The Church will need to have a supply of disposable masks available for anyone who doesn't bring their own mask with them.
- 11) The clergy must wear masks when in close proximity to others, to include, the Processional, distribution of communion, and Recessional. Parishes may want to suspend the Processional and Recessional during this time to reduce the number of acolytes and others needed in the Altar Party, and thus cut down on congestion in the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the sanctuaries in many of our churches are not large enough to provide the necessary space needed for social distancing during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

- 12) The celebrant is NOT required to wear a mask while at the altar, provided they are by themselves and the bread and wine are covered with a linen or pall. Nor are the clergy required to wear a mask while proclaiming the Gospel or preaching, provided they are at least 10 feet away from the nearest person. The Gospel should be proclaimed from the front of the Church instead of the aisle as is customary in many parishes.
- 13) Hand sanitizer must be used by all people when they first arrive at Church and again right before going to receive communion, for indoor services. For outdoor services (where parishioners bring their own chairs), hand sanitizer is only needed just prior to receiving communion. I recommend each parish have someone assigned to hold the container of hand sanitizer as each person has the cleaning agent poured in their hands. This person must use the hand sanitizer first before helping others. They must also wear a mask and stand an arm lengths distance from the person they are ministering to.
- 14) Altar guild members and clergy must thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before setting the altar. Clergy must also clean their hands with hand sanitizer before distributing communion.
- 15) Communion will be received in only one kind (the host/bread). It will be placed in the hand of the recipient, not on their tongue. Care needs to be taken when placing the host in the person's hand in order not to physically touch them. I would ask that communion wafers be used, rather than other forms of bread. The celebrant will consume the consecrated wine on behalf of the people. Individual communion cups with wine for the congregation are NOT authorized.
- 16) Communion will be received while standing (not kneeling), preferably at the head of the center aisle, or it may be taken to people while in their pews or seats. It is important to maintain appropriate social distancing while people come to receive communion. Communion may be distributed to people sitting in their vehicles during parking lot services. Clergy should not bend over into the vehicle to distribute communion, but rather individuals should place their hands outside the car window to receive.
- 17) For those requesting a blessing rather than communion, blessings will be offered over the person while not physically touching the head of the person being blessed.
- 18) If there are any baptisms, the clergy must cleanse their hands with hand sanitizer before and after the baptism as well as wear a mask. The Baptismal water will be poured outside following the service. It will not be saved for use as Holy Water.
- 19) The Peace will need to be shared by means other than personal physical contact. Handshakes and hugs are not allowed at this time.

- 20) Choirs are not allowed at this time, due to social distancing requirements. One or two people may lead the music, provided they are at least 10 feet away from anyone around them. Some congregations may opt not to allow singing during the coronavirus pandemic. The wearing of masks by the congregation should help reduce the potential of spreading respiratory droplets while singing.
- 21) Lectors may remove their masks while reading the lessons, provided they are at least 10 feet from anyone in front of them. If the church space doesn't allow for proper distancing, the lectors need to wear masks.
- 22) The collection plate should not be passed, but rather be placed in a location that parishioners may access to make their offering.
- 23) The bread and wine should be placed on the credence table by the altar guild prior to the start of the service, and not brought up at the time of the offertory.
- 24) Congested areas need to be avoided, especially as people are trying to enter or leave the Church, as well as the communion line and other times when people tend to bunch up. Again, social distancing is very important. Clergy may stand to the side following the service (out of the flow of traffic) if someone needs to speak to them.
- 25) If possible (especially during the warmer weather) keep the windows and doors of the Church open to improve air circulation with fresh outside air.
- 26) To cut down on potential cross contamination, parishes may want to print out the service for everyone to have their own copy, or use overhead projections if they have the means of doing so, as an alternative to the use of Prayer Books and Hymnals. If Prayer Books and Hymnals are used, they will need to be sanitized if they are to be used again within three days (the potential life expectancy of the virus on objects).
- 27) Holy water fonts must be emptied and removed.
- 28) There will be no coffee hours or other social gatherings at church during the time of the pandemic. Many parishes are hosting "virtual coffee hours" that are going well and have been well received as an alternative to in-person coffee hours. Worship together at Church and then go home and visit one another online in the safety of your home, having a cup of coffee or tea and a dessert.
- 29) In-person Vacation Bible School is not permitted this summer due to the inability to maintain appropriate social distancing among kids. Parishes might consider an online version of VBS.
- 30) In-person Sunday School and Youth Group meetings are suspended until the fall, at which time a determination will be made based on the status of COVID-19.

- 31) All outside groups using Church property must practice social distancing, wear masks, use hand sanitizer when they arrive, and follow any other guidelines required by the parish during the Coronavirus Pandemic.
- 32) Unless social distancing requirements can be met, Vestry meetings and other church committees or groups need to be conducted via Zoom or by some other online means.
- 33) Virtual online, recorded and live-stream services should be continued if possible, even after in-person services resume. Not everyone is able to return to church at this time and countless others who we have not effectively reached before, are now being ministered to in very powerful and life changing ways. Keep up the good work!

Everyone's cooperation with these guidelines is greatly appreciated and needed, if we are to provide a safe environment within each of our Churches, for our parishioners and visitors to come and worship our Heavenly Father and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May God bless each of us richly, as we gather in His name, and go forth offering ourselves as a channel of His love and mercy and healing grace during this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Faithfully in Christ,

**+Bill**

Rt. Rev. William H. Love

Bishop of Albany

**Please Note:** Upon receipt and review of the above Diocesan Guidelines, the Rector or Clergy in Charge, as well as one Warden are asked to please sign and return the following form to the Diocesan Office.

**Statement of Agreement**

Dear Bishop Love,

The clergy and lay leadership of \_\_\_\_\_ Church in \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge receipt of the Diocese of Albany Guidelines for resuming in-person worship and ministry within our church buildings, and pledge to abide by them to the best of our ability throughout the time of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Faithfully in Christ,

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clergy

\_\_\_\_\_  
Warden





## INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR RELIGIOUS & FUNERAL SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

### When you have read this document, you can affirm at the bottom.

As of June 6, 2020

#### Purpose

This Interim Guidance for Religious and Funeral Services and Operations of Faith-Based institutions during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (“Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Religious and Funeral Services and Operations of Faith-Based Institutions”) was created to provide faith leaders and officiants of religious and funeral services and their employees, contractors, volunteers, and attendees with precautions to help protect against the spread of COVID-19 as religious and funeral services reopen or increase activity. This guidance applies to all religious and funeral gatherings, including burial and committal services.

These guidelines are minimum requirements only, and additional precautions or increased restrictions may be required by the institution or operator. These guidelines are based on the best-known public health practices at the time of publication, and the documentation upon which these guidelines are based can and does change frequently. The Responsible Parties – as defined below – are accountable for adhering to all local, state and federal requirements relative to religious and funeral services. The Responsible Parties are also accountable for staying current with any updates to these requirements, as well as incorporating same into any religious and funeral services and/or Site Safety Plan.

#### Background

On March 7, 2020, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo issued Executive Order 202, declaring a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. Community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred throughout New York. To minimize further spread, social distancing of at least six feet must be maintained between individuals, where possible.

On April 15, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 202.17, directing that any individual who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face-covering must cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, social distance. On April 16, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 202.18, directing that everyone using public or private transportation carriers or other for-hire vehicles, who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face covering, must wear a mask or face covering over the nose and mouth during any such trip. It also directed any operators or drivers of public or private transport to wear a face covering or mask which covers the nose and mouth while there are any passengers in such a vehicle. On May 29, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 202.34, authorizing business operators/owners with the discretion to deny admittance to individuals who fail to comply with the face covering or mask requirements.

On April 26, 2020, Governor Cuomo announced a phased approach to reopen industries and businesses in New York in phases based upon a data-driven, regional analysis. On May 4, 2020, the Governor provided that the regional analysis would consider several public health factors, including new COVID-19 infections, as well as health care system, diagnostic testing, and contact tracing capacity. On

May 11, 2020, Governor Cuomo announced that the first phase of reopening would begin on May 15, 2020 in several regions of New York, based upon available regional metrics and indicators. On May 29, 2020, Governor Cuomo announced that the second phase of reopening would begin in several regions of the state, and announced the use of a new early warning dashboard that aggregates the state's expansive data collection efforts for New Yorkers, government officials, and experts to monitor and review how the virus is being contained to ensure a safe reopening.

In addition to the following standards, any Department of Health guidance and directives for maintaining clean and safe work environments must be followed.

Please note that where guidance in this document differs from other guidance documents issued by New York State, the more recent guidance shall apply.

## **Standards for Responsible Religious and Funeral Services in New York State**

No religious and funeral services activity can occur without meeting the following minimum State standards, as well as applicable federal requirements, including but not limited to such minimum standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and United States Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The State standards contained within this guidance apply to all religious and funeral services in operation during the COVID-19 public health emergency until rescinded or amended by the State. The operator of the religious or funeral service, or another party as may be designated by the operator (in either case, "the Responsible Parties"), shall be responsible for meeting these standards.

The following guidance is organized around three distinct categories: people, places, and processes.

## **I. PEOPLE**

### **A. Physical Distancing**

- Responsible Parties must ensure that for any religious or funeral service occurring indoors, the congregant/attendee capacity is limited to 10 people for locations that are in Phase 1 and no more than 25% of the maximum occupancy for a particular area as set by the certificate of occupancy for locations in Phase 2.
  - If separate buildings are available for use, Responsible Parties may have multiple groups of 10 in separate buildings at the same time in Phase 1 or a maximum occupancy of 25% in separate buildings at the same time in Phase 2, so long as the buildings have separate entrances and exits designated and groups do not interact.
- Responsible Parties must ensure that a distance of at least six feet is maintained amongst all individuals at all times, unless safety of the core activity requires a shorter distance (e.g. pallbearing) or the individuals are members of the same household. However, any singing activity must provide for a distance between individuals of at least twelve feet, subject to additional protective measures. Any time employees, volunteers, and/or attendees must come within six feet of another person, (or twelve feet if singing) acceptable face coverings must be worn, unless they are members of the same household. Employees, volunteers, and/or attendees must be prepared to don a face covering if another person unexpectedly comes within six feet (e.g. when walking to seats). (See below).

- Acceptable face coverings to protect against COVID-19 include but are not limited to cloth-based face coverings and disposable masks that cover both the mouth and nose.
- Responsible Parties may modify the use and/or restrict the number of stations (e.g. podiums) and seating areas, so that staff members, volunteers, and attendees are at least six feet apart in all directions (e.g. side-to-side, in rows, and when facing one another) and are not sharing stations or seats without cleaning and disinfection between use, unless all individuals are members of the same household (e.g. seating allows household members to sit together, so long as six feet of distance from non-household members). When distancing is not feasible between stations (e.g. sound booths), Responsible Parties must provide and require the use of face coverings and/or enact physical barriers, such as plastic shielding walls, in lieu of face coverings in areas where they would not affect air flow, heating, cooling, or ventilation.
  - If used, physical barriers should be put in place in accordance with [OSHA guidelines](#).
  - Physical barrier options may include strip curtains, plexiglass or similar materials, or other impermeable dividers or partitions.
- Responsible Parties must prohibit the use of small spaces (e.g. vehicles, elevators) by more than one individual at a time, unless all individuals in such space at the same time are wearing acceptable face coverings. However, even with face coverings in use, occupancy must never exceed 50% of the maximum capacity of the space or vehicle, unless it is designed for use by a single occupant. Responsible Parties should increase ventilation with outdoor air to the greatest extent possible (e.g. opening windows and doors), while maintaining safety protocols. Responsible Parties should take additional measures to prevent congregation in elevator waiting areas and limit density in elevators, such as enabling the use of stairs.
- Responsible Parties must put in place measures to reduce bi-directional foot traffic using tape or signs with arrows in narrow aisles, hallways, pews, or spaces, and post signage and distance markers denoting spaces of six feet in all commonly used areas and any areas in which lines are commonly formed or people may congregate (e.g. restrooms, entrances, health screening stations, etc.).
- Responsible Parties must post signs throughout the facility, consistent with DOH COVID-19 signage. Responsible Parties can develop their own customized signage specific to their workplace or setting, provided that such signage is consistent with the Department’s signage. Signage should be used to remind individuals to:
  - Cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when six feet of social distance cannot be maintained.
  - Properly store and, when necessary, discard PPE.
  - Adhere to physical distancing instructions.
  - Report symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19, and how they should do so.
  - Follow hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfection guidelines.
  - Follow appropriate respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
  - Prohibit holding or shaking hands of members of different households during services or prayers.

## **B. Gatherings in Enclosed Spaces**

- Responsible Parties must limit in-person gatherings (e.g. rehearsals, congregational meetings) to 10 people or fewer in Phase 1 and to 25% of maximum occupancy in Phase 2, and may use other methods such as video, teleconferencing, or drive-in services whenever possible, per CDC guidance

"Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)".

- Responsible Parties must put in place practices for adequate social distancing in small areas, such as restrooms and breakrooms, and should develop signage and systems (e.g. flagging when occupied) to restrict occupancy when social distancing cannot be maintained in such areas; and
- Responsible Parties should stagger schedules for staff members and volunteers to observe social distancing (e.g. six feet of space) for any gathering (e.g. coffee breaks, and shift starts/stops).

### **C. Gathering Activity**

- Responsible Parties must take measures to reduce interpersonal contact and congregation, through methods such as:
  - limiting in-person presence of staff to only those employees/volunteers who are necessary;
  - holding services outdoors, when possible (e.g. outdoor service for religious gatherings, or graveside-only service for funerals);
  - reducing on-site attendees to accommodate social distancing guidelines;
  - providing remote service options (e.g. live streaming, AM/FM broadcast);
  - allowing drive-in services:
    - Ensure attendees remain in the vehicle in which they arrived.
    - Attendees should not interact physically with clergy, employees, or attendees in other vehicles.
    - Vehicles should contain only members of a single household;
    - Cars must be at least 6 feet apart, or use alternate parking spaces.
  - offering multiple service times, including separate times for vulnerable populations (e.g. those over 70, who have underlying health condition, or those how are immunocompromised);
  - encouraging advanced sign-ups to manage capacity;
  - prioritizing activities that allow for social distancing over those that do not;
  - avoiding multiple people and/or teams working in one area by staggering scheduled activities and using signs to indicate occupied areas;
  - changing or removing practices that involve close or proximate contact or sharing things among members of different households, such as:
    - sharing a car or limousine ride between locations;
    - providing food and beverages for attendees before, during, or after the event or service.
- Responsible Parties must limit activities involving singing, e.g., a choir, soloist, cantor, or musical ensemble, unless at least 12 feet of separation can be provided between individuals, or additional distancing or physical barriers can reduce transmission of respiratory droplets.

### **D. Movement and Operations**

- Responsible Parties must establish designated areas for pickups and deliveries, limiting contact to the extent possible.

- Responsible Parties should limit on-site interactions (e.g. designate an egress for individuals leaving the premises and a separate ingress for individuals entering) and movements (e.g. individuals should remain near their stations or seats as often as possible).

## II. PLACES

### A. Protective Equipment

- Responsible Parties must procure, fashion, or otherwise obtain acceptable face coverings and provide such coverings to their employees while at work at no cost to the employee. Responsible Parties should have an adequate supply of face coverings, masks and other required personal protective equipment (PPE) on hand should an employee need a replacement, or should a visitor or attendee be in need. Acceptable face coverings include, but are not limited to, cloth (e.g. homemade sewn, quick cut, bandana), surgical masks, and face shields.
- Responsible Parties must ensure all attendees wear face coverings that completely cover the nose and mouth unless doing so would be contrary to the individual's health or safety due to medical a condition, or if the attendee is under two years old.
  - Face coverings are required at all times except while seated, provided all individuals are six feet apart except for immediate household members. Faith leaders, officiants, volunteers, and/or attendees must be prepared to don a face covering if another person unexpectedly comes within six feet (e.g. when walking to seats).
- Face coverings must be cleaned or replaced after use and may not be shared. Please consult the [CDC guidance](#) for additional information on cloth face coverings and other types of PPE, as well as instructions on use and cleaning.
- Responsible Parties must allow those performing the religious service or ceremony to use their own acceptable face coverings but cannot require such participants to supply their own face coverings. Further, this guidance shall not prevent employees, officiants, volunteers or attendees from wearing their personally owned additional protective coverings (e.g. surgical masks, or face shields).
- Responsible Parties should consider putting in place measures to limit the sharing of objects, such as religious texts, collection plates, and other materials, as well as the touching of shared surfaces, such as pews, instruments, doors, and railings; or, require employees and volunteers to wear gloves when in contact with shared objects or frequently touched surfaces; or, require employees, volunteers, and attendees to sanitize or wash their hands before and after contact.
- If providing gowns or other garments, Responsible Parties must ensure they are clean and laundered between uses.
- Responsible Parties may implement the following practices to limit the sharing of materials:
  - Place donation plates/boxes in central location with proper distancing protocols in place;
  - Remove religious texts from pews or benches, and encourage congregation to bring their own;
  - If choir/musical ensemble meets enhanced distancing measures, encourage members to launder their own gowns at home, and bring their own instruments, where possible;
  - Adapt certain religious practices that traditionally require close or proximate contact in order to minimize contact between individuals; and/or
  - Empty fonts or other shared water-related service or ceremonial activities.

- Responsible Parties must train employees on how to adequately don, doff, clean (as applicable), and discard PPE, including but not limited to, appropriate face coverings.

## B. Hygiene, Cleaning, and Disinfection

- Responsible Parties must ensure adherence to hygiene, cleaning and disinfection requirements as advised by the CDC and DOH, including ["Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Public and Private Facilities for COVID-19,"](#) and the ["STOP THE SPREAD"](#) poster, as applicable. Responsible Parties must maintain logs that include the date, time, and scope of cleaning and disinfection.
- Responsible Parties must provide and maintain hand hygiene stations on site, as follows:
  - For handwashing: soap, running warm water, and disposable paper towels.
  - For sanitizer: an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol for areas where handwashing facilities may not be available or practical.
  - Hand sanitizer must be placed throughout the location for use by all attending or working. It should be placed in convenient locations such as points of entrance/exit.
  - Place receptacles around the facility for disposal of soiled items, including PPE.
- Responsible Parties must provide appropriate cleaning and disinfection supplies for shared and frequently touched surfaces and encourage participants to use these supplies before and after use of these surfaces, followed by hand hygiene.
- Responsible Parties must conduct regular cleaning and disinfection of the location or facility and more frequent cleaning and disinfection for high risk areas used by many individuals and for frequently touched surfaces. Cleaning and disinfection must be rigorous and ongoing and must occur at least after each service. Please refer to DOH's ["Interim Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Public and Private Facilities for COVID-19"](#) for detailed instructions on how to clean and disinfect facilities.
  - Responsible Parties must ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of restrooms. Restrooms should be cleaned and disinfected more often depending on frequency of use.
    - Responsible Parties must ensure distancing rules are adhered to by reducing restroom capacity where feasible.
  - Responsible Parties must ensure that shared objects are regularly disinfected using registered disinfectants, including at least between services. Refer to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) [list of products](#) registered in New York State and identified by the EPA as effective against COVID-19.
  - If cleaning or disinfection products or the act of cleaning and disinfection causes safety hazards or degrades the material (e.g. religious artifact), Responsible Parties must put in place hand hygiene stations between use and/or supply disposable gloves and/or limitations on the number of individuals touching such material.
  - Responsible Parties must provide for the cleaning and disinfection of exposed areas in the event of a positive case of COVID-19, with such cleaning and disinfection to include, at a minimum, all heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g. pews, religious texts, collection plates, railings, doors and other objects).
- CDC guidelines on ["Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility"](#) if someone is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection are as follows:
  - Close off areas used by the person who is sick.



- Responsible Parties do not necessarily need to close operations, if they can close off the affected areas.
- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
- Wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, and shared equipment.
- Once the area has been appropriately disinfected, it can be opened for use.
  - Anyone without close or proximate contact with the person who is sick can return to the area immediately after disinfection.
  - Refer to DOH’s [“Interim Guidance for Public and Private Employees Returning to Work Following COVID-19 Infection or Exposure”](#) for information on “close or proximate” contacts.
- If more than seven days have passed since the person who is sick visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary, but routine cleaning and disinfection should continue.
- For funeral related services, Responsible Parties must prohibit touching, hugging, or kissing the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 per CDC guidance, [“Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families.”](#)
- Responsible Parties must prohibit shared food and beverages (e.g. buffet style meals).

#### **D. Phased Reopening**

- Responsible Parties are encouraged to phase-in reopening activities so as to allow for operational issues to be resolved before production or work activities return to normal levels. Responsible Parties should consider limiting the number of staff members and volunteers, hours, and number of attendees available to be served when first reopening so as to provide operations with the ability to adjust to the changes.

#### **D. Communications Plan**

- Responsible Parties must affirm that they have reviewed and understand the state-issued industry guidelines, and that they will implement them.
- Responsible Parties should develop a communications plan for employees, volunteers, or congregants, that includes applicable instructions, training, signage, and a consistent means to provide staff members with information. Responsible Parties may consider developing webpages, text and email groups, and social media.

### **III. PROCESSES**

#### **A. Screening and Testing**

- Responsible Parties must implement mandatory daily health screening practices for employees, faith leaders and volunteers. Responsible Parties are encouraged to offer optional health screenings for attendees.

- Screening practices may be performed remotely (e.g. by telephone or electronic survey), before the person arrives to the building, to the extent possible; or may be performed on site.
- Screening should be coordinated to prevent person from intermingling in close or proximate contact with each other prior to completion of the screening.
- At a minimum, screening should be completed using a questionnaire that determines whether the person has:
  - (a) knowingly been in close or proximate contact in the past 14 days with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who has or had symptoms of COVID-19;
  - (b) tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days; and/or
  - (c) has experienced any symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Refer to CDC guidance on "[Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)" for the most up to date information on symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- Responsible Parties should require a person to immediately disclose if and when their responses to any of the aforementioned questions changes, such as if they begin to experience symptoms, including during or outside of work hours.
- Daily temperature checks of employees may also be conducted per U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or DOH guidelines. Responsible Parties are prohibited from keeping records of individuals' health data (e.g. temperature data).
- Responsible Parties must ensure that any personnel performing screening activities, including temperature checks, are appropriately protected from exposure to potentially infectious employees or visitors entering the site. Personnel performing screening activities must be trained by individuals who are familiar with CDC, DOH, and OSHA protocols.
- Screeners must be provided and use PPE, including at a minimum, a face mask, and may include gloves, a gown, and/or a face shield.
- A person who screens positive for COVID-19 symptoms should not be allowed to enter the gathering place and should be sent home with instructions to contact their healthcare provider for assessment and testing. Responsible Parties must immediately notify the state and local health department about the case if test results are positive for COVID-19 and they are so informed by the affected person or persons. Responsible Parties should provide the person with information on healthcare and testing resources.
- Responsible Parties must review all responses collected by the screening process on a daily basis and maintain a record of such review. Responsible Parties must also identify a contact as the party for individuals to inform if they later are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, as noted in the questionnaire.
- Responsible Parties must designate a site safety monitor whose responsibilities include continuous compliance with all aspects of the site safety plan.
- To the extent possible, Responsible Parties should maintain a log of every person, including employees and visitors, who may have close or proximate contact with other individuals at the gathering site or area; excluding deliveries that are performed with appropriate PPE or through contactless means. The log should contain contact information, such that all contacts may be identified, traced and notified in the event an employee, volunteer, or attendee is diagnosed with



COVID-19. Responsible Parties must cooperate with state and local health department contact tracing efforts. The log is not required to maintain a list of attendees.

- Responsible Parties cannot mandate that attendees complete a health screen or provide contact information but may encourage attendees to do so. Responsible Parties may provide an option for attendees to provide contact information so they can be logged and contacted for contact tracing, if necessary.
- Responsible Parties should refer to DOH's "[Interim Guidance for Public and Private Employees Returning to Work Following COVID-19 Infection or Exposure](#)" regarding protocols and policies for employees seeking to return to work after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 or after the employee had close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19.

## **B. Tracing and Tracking**

- Responsible Parties must notify the state and local health department immediately upon being informed of any positive COVID-19 test result by an employee or faith leader at their site.
- In the case of an employee or faith leader testing positive, the Responsible Parties must cooperate with the state and local health department to trace all contacts in the workplace and notify the state and local health department of all employees and visitors who entered the site dating back to 48 hours before the employee began experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or tested positive, whichever is earlier, but maintain confidentiality as required by federal and state law and regulations.
- Local health departments will implement monitoring and movement restrictions of infected or exposed persons including home isolation or quarantine.
- Individuals who are alerted that they have come into close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19, and have been alerted via tracing, tracking or other mechanism, are required to self-report to their employer at the time of alert and shall follow the protocol referenced above.

## **IV. OPERATOR PLANS**

Responsible Parties must conspicuously post completed safety plans on site. The State has made available a safety plan template to guide in developing plans to protect against the spread of COVID-19, and such plans are adaptable for faith-based institutions to use.

### **Additional safety information, guidelines, and resources are available at:**

New York State Department of Health Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website  
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration COVID-19 Website  
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

**At the link below, affirm that you have read and understand your obligation to operate in accordance with this guidance:**

<https://forms.ny.gov/s3/ny-forward-affirmation>



# Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19 For Houses of Worship

March 12, 2020

*To help prevent spread of COVID-19, procedures and supplies should be in place to encourage proper hand and respiratory hygiene as well as routine cleaning and disinfection of high-risk locations. This guidance is provided for any local or state public or private facility so that owners, operators and other individuals can incorporate these procedures into their facility protocols.*

## Background:

In December 2019, a new respiratory disease called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was detected in China. COVID-19 is caused by a virus (SARS-CoV-2) that is part of a large family of viruses called coronaviruses.

## Hand Hygiene:

Signage with handwashing procedures should be posted in prominent locations promoting hand hygiene.

- Regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds should be done:
  - Before and after eating.
  - After sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing.
  - After using the restroom.
  - Before handling food.
  - After touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated.
  - After using shared equipment and supplies like electronic equipment such as keyboards, mice and phones.

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers by children should always be supervised by adults.

## Respiratory Hygiene:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of elbow.
- Disposing of soiled tissues immediately after use.

## What steps should be taken to clean and disinfect against COVID-19?

### Now:

All settings should continue performing routine cleaning. High-risk locations (see below) warrant cleaning and disinfection on a regular schedule.

### If an individual with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 was symptomatic while in a facility:

Clean and disinfect throughout the area.

## **Routine Cleaning:**

As part of standard infection control practices, routine cleaning should be ongoing, and time should be allocated for individuals to routinely clean. Surfaces touched most frequently should be prioritized for routine cleaning because soiled and frequently touched surfaces can be reservoirs for germs and an exposure pathway for transmission to people through contact with these surfaces.

Examples of priority areas for routine cleaning include:

- High contact surfaces that are touched by many different people, such as light switches, handrails and doorknobs/handles.
- Dust- and wet-mopping or auto-scrubbing floors.
- Vacuuming of entryways and high traffic areas.
- Removing trash.
- Cleaning restrooms.
- Wiping heat and air conditioner vents.
- Spot cleaning walls.
- Spot cleaning carpets.
- Dusting horizontal surfaces and light fixtures.
- Cleaning spills.
- Regular cleaning and laundering of linens.

## **Identify and routinely clean and disinfect high-risk locations even before a confirmed case of COVID-19 occurs.**

Examples of high-risk locations include:

### First Aid Station / Health Office:

- Clean and disinfect health cots regularly (after each use)
- Cover treatment tables and use pillow protectors
- Discard or launder coverings after each use

### Restrooms

- Clean and disinfect all restroom surfaces, fixtures, door knobs, push plates, and switches (at least once daily).

## **Examples of frequently touched surfaces:**

- Desks and chairs;
- Counters, tables and chairs;
- Door handles and push plates;
- Handrails;
- Kitchen and bathroom faucets;
- Appliance surfaces;
- Light switches;
- Handles on equipment (e.g., carts);
- Remote controls;
- Shared telephones;
- Shared computers, keyboards and mice
- Shared electronics and phones
- Shared computer keyboards and mice.

**Note:** Computer keyboards are difficult to clean due to the spaces between keys and the sensitivity of its hardware to liquids. When shared, they may contribute to indirect transmission. Locations with community use computers should provide posted signs regarding proper hand hygiene before and after using the computers to minimize disease transmission. Also, consider using keyboard covers to protect the hardware against spills and facilitate cleaning.

### Dining Areas

- Clean and disinfect counters, tables, and chairs regularly (at least once daily).

### Other Frequently Touched Surfaces

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on a periodic schedule as operational considerations allow, which may range from at least daily to up to 72 hours.

### **Cleaning and Disinfection:**

Cleaning removes germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces or objects. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects.

Individuals do not need to wear respiratory protection while cleaning or disinfecting, but should use personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves) as recommended on product labels. Carefully read and follow all label instructions for safe and effective use.

**Step 1: Cleaning:** Always clean surfaces prior to use of disinfectants in order to reduce soil and remove germs. Dirt and other materials on surfaces can reduce the effectiveness of disinfectants. Clean surfaces using water and soap or detergent to reduce soil and remove germs. For combination products that can both clean and disinfect, always follow the instructions on the specific product label to ensure effective use. In New York State, all state agencies and state authorities are required to use green cleaning products. For additional information on the laws regarding the use of green cleaning products, see the [Policies, Guidelines and Report](#) section of NY's Green Cleaning Program website.

**Step 2: Disinfection:** Cleaning of soiled areas must be completed prior to disinfection to ensure the effectiveness of the disinfectant product. Use the DEC [list of products](#) registered in New York State identified as effective against COVID-19. This list corresponds those identified by the EPA.

If these products are unavailable, disinfect surfaces using an EPA- and DEC\*-registered disinfectant labeled to be effective against rhinovirus and/or human coronavirus. If these commercial products are unavailable, it is also acceptable to use a fresh 2% chlorine bleach solution (approximately 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 quart of water). Prepare the bleach solution daily or as needed.

- Label directions must be followed when using disinfectants to ensure the target viruses are effectively killed. This includes adequate contact times (i.e., the amount of time a disinfectant should remain on surfaces to be effective), which may vary between five and ten minutes after application. Disinfectants that come in a wipe form will also list effective contact times on their label.
- For disinfectants that come in concentrated forms, it is important to carefully follow instructions for making the diluted concentration needed to effectively kill the target virus. This information can be found on the product label.

**Step 3: Disposal:** Place all used gloves and other disposable items in a bag that can be tied closed before disposing of them with other waste. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds immediately after removing gloves or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly soiled.

**Procedures and Training:**

**If a laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 was symptomatic while in a facility, perform cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces throughout the area.** Cleaning and disinfection should be conducted by individuals who have been trained to use products in a safe and effective manner. Training should be ongoing to ensure procedures for safe and effective use of all products are followed. Training assures that individuals are reminded to read and follow use and safety instructions on product labels. It should also identify the location of all personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves) that should be used.

\*NYSDEC registration will not be listed on disinfection product labels. Information about disinfection product registration with NYSDEC can be found at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/nyspad/products>. If you have any questions about NYSDEC pesticide registration, please call the NYSDEC Bureau of Pesticide Management at 518-402-8748.

**More information:**

New York State Department of Health's COVID-19 Webpage:  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Webpage:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>



**New York Forward**

## Business Affirmation

**We have received your reopening affirmation on 06/09/2020 at 11:11 am.**

*Print or take a screenshot of this page for your records.*

**Your next step is to create and post your NY Forward Business Safety Plan.**

[Download the NY Forward Business Safety Plan Template](#)

*I am the owner or agent of the business listed. I have reviewed the New York State interim guidance for business re-opening activities and operations during the COVID-19 public health emergency and I affirm that I have read and understand my obligation to operate in accordance with such guidance.*

### **St. Peter's by the Lake**

Religious organization or funeral service operator

Fr. Neal Longe

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