

HOUSES OF WORSHIP: COVID-19 Best Practices

Phase 1 Re-opening

5/8/2020

PHASE 1 of RE-OPENING: *(Guidelines: Opening Up America, from CDC and White House)*

1. All vulnerable individuals (older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) should continue to shelter in place.
2. All individuals should maximize physical distance (6 feet) from others.
3. Avoid socializing in groups of more than 10 people.

GUIDELINES TO PREVENT SPREAD OF COVID-19

- Stay home when you are sick
- Wear a face mask
- Keep 6-feet distance from others
- Wash your hands often

GETTING READY TO RE-OPEN?

COVID-19 is a silent killer. Any of us can carry the virus before showing symptoms and without knowing it. Thus, houses of worship cannot be relaxed in developing and implementing a plan to re-open. Each congregation has a unique setting and will need to decide its own timeline and procedures appropriate for its own context.

COVID-19 guidelines created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can be adapted and adopted by congregation leaders in order to create a safe space and experience for all who enter into a house of worship.

GATHERING IN YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Stay home when you are sick

CONGREGATION ACTIONS:

- Announce, Announce, Announce: Stay home if you are sick—this includes a running nose and cough. Don't assume it is allergies. Use social media to reinforce the COVID-19 guidelines.
- Older adults and those who have serious underlying medical conditions should not attend in Phase 1. (If preacher/worship leader is in that category, restrict the amount of interaction with others.)

Wear a face mask

REMINDER: Face masks protect others from YOU! Each of us can carry COVID-19 without knowing it.

CONGREGATION ACTIONS:

- Check-in with your congregation's elderly and those at risk to assure each has a face mask.
- Provide a face mask for those who show up at your house of worship without a face covering.
- Encourage all to wear a face covering whenever in your house of worship.
- FOOD: Expect anyone who prepares and serves food (cookies, coffee, etc.) to wear a face mask and plastic gloves, maintaining same standards as restaurants. Set a policy that no one enters the kitchen without wearing a face mask.
- Set an example for others by expecting all worship leaders, choir members, teachers, and youth leaders to wear a face mask while interacting with others.
- Position the pulpit in a location where it is at least 6 feet from anyone. This will allow a preacher the option to remove his/her face mask before preaching.

Keep 6-feet distance from others

CONGREGATION ACTIONS:

- Consider if dividers are needed in order to protect office staff, organist, musicians, etc.

FOR MORE INFO: ifedgbr.com

Prepared by Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge in consultation with Dr. Dan Godbee, Medical Director, East Baton Rouge Parish Emergency Medical Services

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- Decide how to handle visitors/delivery of flowers/packages during the week.
- Review entrances/exits into buildings; if possible, dedicate doors for a single purpose (entering or exiting).
- Expect small groups to keep 6-feet distance from each other—especially children and youth.
- Review Louisiana State Fire Marshal standards for worship and activities held outside
- Determine 25% occupancy of worship space and other large rooms (as in restaurant guidelines)
 - Mark off pews/chairs not to be used
 - Develop a plan if the count exceeds the 25% occupancy (Ex. People might move to an overflow room where 6 feet distancing could be maintained and worship might be streamed.)
 - Plan for those who share the same house can sit together since they need not comply with the physical distancing expectation.
- Decide and train volunteers on NEW procedures for the following:
 - Greeters: Welcome people without handshakes/contact, perhaps with one person opening door
 - Programs/bulletins: Place a few in each of the designated seating areas.
 - Choir/Singers: Keep 6-feet distance in all directions (due to projected aerosols from voice.)
 - Collection of offering without passing a plate/basket, perhaps using a basket in the back or front with each person leaving financial gifts.
 - Communion: Do NOT drink and eat from same vessels. (Specific denominations may have additional guidelines.)

Wash your hands often ... for 20 seconds

REMINDER: Expand personal prevention hygiene from washing hands (and wearing gloves) to include the cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces contacted by multiple persons in a public setting.

CONGREGATION ACTIONS:

- Provide sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) at entrance doors.
- MICROPHONES: Implement one microphone per person policy or sanitize microphones with alcohol between uses.
- Stock restroom with ample supply of plain soap in dispenser. Do NOT share the same bar of soap. (NOTE: CDC advises the best way to wash hands is still with plain soap and water.) Clean restroom often.
- Develop clear plan to clean and sanitize pews, interior/exterior door handles, etc. after each gathering
- Provide protective supplies and procedures for those who are cleaning.

SENDING for ACTS OF KINDNESS

Many sincere, well-meaning people from your congregation will want to share compassion with their neighbor in concrete ways. No one wants to unintentionally become vectors of disease to others. Find creative ways to train and educate on ways to share acts of loving kindness which protects the giver and the receiver during this uncharted territory of COVID-19. Use the following guidelines:

If you feel sick, stay home

Wearing a face mask

1. Indicates to others that you are aware of COVID-19 and want to protect THEM.
2. Reminds yourself of the risk to be interacting with others and to keep appropriate distance.

Keep 6-feet distance from others

1. Call ahead to make arrangements to leave food/groceries/items at door while keeping distant.

Wash your hands often

1. Keep sanitizers in your car to clean your hands (and steering wheel) until you can wash them thoroughly.

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