

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

Latest updates: Added links to additional guidance around music activities and event photography.

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. For receptions and other gatherings before or after the ceremony, see the [Guidance for Safe Celebrations and Events \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf\)](https://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf).

Large gatherings continue to present significant risk for increasing the spread of COVID-19. All faith communities are encouraged to provide remote services and choose **not** to open or host large gatherings. If there is evidence of COVID-19 spread within your faith community, you may be advised to stop offering in-person services until it is safe to return. Contact your local or state health department for further guidance in these situations.

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 at large gatherings, 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.
- ✓ **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. Additionally, the Executive Order requires workers to wear a face covering when working outdoors in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained. 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).

Gatherings in a place of worship or ceremonies such as a funeral or wedding

- 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. For indoor worship settings, occupancy must not exceed 50% of total capacity, with a maximum of 250 people in a single self-contained space. In outdoor settings, gatherings must not exceed 250 people.
- Provide controlled flow of participants as much as possible, including upon start and at end of the event.
- 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.

See the next section for more details and refer to [Stay Safe Guidance \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp) for complete guidance for Places of Worship Entities and other applicable industry guidance.

Gatherings for ceremonies or socializing in homes or private settings

Limit to 10 people or less indoors, 25 people or less outdoors.

Gatherings for receptions and other activities before and after ceremonies

Gatherings taking place in indoor and outdoor venues such as event centers, faith-based buildings, community centers, rental halls, or at similar outdoor spaces and that are providing food and beverages for on-site consumption have a limit of indoor and outdoor occupant capacity of 25% up to 250 persons. A responsible party must be assigned to develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan. See the [Guidance for Safe Celebrations and Events \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf\)](https://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf) for more information.

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:

1. 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 as required by the Executive Order.
3. Practice good hygiene: cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands often, wear face coverings or masks.
4. Ensure building safety and proper ventilation protocols.
5. Ensure safe practices and protocols for drop-off, pick-up, and deliveries.
6. 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).
7. Communicate and train all staff on these practices and protocols.
8. Ensure that all activities held in your building(s) follow your practices and protocols (support or community groups, distribution of essential items, etc.).
9. 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.
10. Ensure that you have enough cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and tissues. 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 on the [MDH Materials and Resources for COVID-19 Response page \(health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html\)](https://health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html).

For detailed guidance about building usage and ventilation information, including how to get your building ready to be used after extended closure, drop-off, pick-up, and delivery practices and protocols, cleaning and disinfection protocols, and more, see the [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).

Recommendations for faith community members and participants

Before the service or ceremony

- 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.
- 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.

During the service or ceremony

- Regularly wash or sanitize hands, cover coughs and sneezes, and wear a face covering.
- 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).
- 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 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf).
- Avoid touching items often touched by others if possible. Sanitize high-touch items between shared users and between services.
- Adapt all practices during the services to avoid close contact and maintain social distancing (greetings, collections, sharing of ceremonial objects, communion, etc.).
- For prayer that involves close facial contact to the floor or carpet, bring your own rug, or use a paper covering for one-time use and then disposal.
- 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 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.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.

For detailed information, see the [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).

Resources

From the State of Minnesota:

- [Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening 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 \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/places-of-worship.jsp)
- [Stay Safe Guidance for Businesses and Organizations \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp)

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

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



Minnesota Department of Health | health.mn.gov | 651-201-5000
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

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

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