COVID-19 Preparedness Plan
Requirements for Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals

1/7/2021

Executive Order 21-01 will begin Sunday, Jan. 10 at 11:59 p.m. and does not have an end date. Places of worship, funeral homes, and similar other venues that offer space for planned services must comply with the requirements set forth in EO 21-01 and the requirements provided in this document to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

For guidance around receptions and other social gatherings related to ceremonies, refer to the Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf).

Frequently asked Questions about all Executive Orders may have additional clarifications about requirements and recommendations. See Frequently Asked Questions about Stay Safe MN (https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/faq.jsp) or Stay Safe Guidance for Businesses and Organizations (https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp).

Executive Order (EO) 21-01

The full executive order (EO) with all requirements can be found at Executive Orders from Governor Walz (https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp).

- Social gatherings limited. Social gatherings are limited as described on the Social Gatherings webpage (https://staysafe.mn.gov/individuals-families/social-gatherings.jsp). Most commercial activities are not considered social gatherings, so this change will not impact most industries.

- Masks and face coverings required. EO 20-81, requiring face coverings in certain settings, remains in full force and effect. See Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations under Executive Order 20-81 and 20-103 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).
**COVID-19 Preparedness Plan Requirements for Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals**

- **People at higher risk.** All people currently living within the State of Minnesota who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, as defined by EO 20-55, are strongly urged to stay at home or in their place of residence and follow the provisions of EO 20-55.

- **Work from home.** All people who can work from home must continue to do so.

- **Business and activities are affected differently.** For a full listing of all business and activity requirements and limitations, see the full executive order at [Executive Orders from Governor Walz](https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp). Please review the guidance below for industry-specific requirements and applicable COVID-19 Preparedness Plan Guidance Requirements.

**EO 21-01 requirements for faith-based communities, places of worship, weddings, and funerals**

- Faith-based communities, places of worship, funeral homes and other venues that offer space for wedding services, funeral services, and planned services such as worship, rituals, prayer meetings, or scripture studies will be able to continue to provide such services and ceremonies, provided these venues develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan that follows the requirements in this guidance.

- Limit indoor occupant capacity to no more than 50%.

- Control the environment.

  - **Directed or controlled movement** is permitted when essential to the service (e.g., directing people to available or assigned seating, communion, creating a queue to honor the remains of someone who has died), and is planned by the organizers of the service.

  - Organizers of a service must prepare and implement controls such as seating or standing areas that are clearly set apart or marked, and establish clear, controlled, and directed queuing when engaged in movement to ensure that people maintain a distance of 6 feet from other households at all times and that uncontrolled movement does not occur during a service.

- Venues hosting planned services must prohibit uncontrolled mingling or gathering before or after the service, as this type of contact creates an increased risk of transmission.

  - If the venue offers a space for patrons to mingle or gather before or after a service, the gathering must be conducted according to the Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf)).

- Unless food or beverage is an indispensable part of a ritual, service, or ceremony (e.g., communion), services and ceremonies do not fall under this guidance if they involve food or beverage service or consumption (whether for purchase, complementary, or brought on site).

  - Services or ceremonies that involve food and beverage service that is not an indispensable part of the service or ceremony must be limited in size and conducted according to the Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf)).

Faith-based communities, places of worship, funeral homes, and other venues that offer gathering space for weddings, funerals, and planned services such as worship, rituals, prayer meetings, and scripture studies must implement the plan at all of their locations, and at services or events led by their organizations but held in other locations.

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 safety precautions included in these requirements 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. This applies to people who have already been vaccinated, too.

- Stay home when sick.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from other people.
- Wear face coverings in indoor businesses and public indoor spaces and outdoors when 6 feet of social distancing cannot be consistently maintained.
- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
COVID-19 Preparedness Plans

As required by the Executive Orders (also referred to as “EOs”) issued by Governor Tim Walz under the Peacetime Emergency, all businesses, both critical or non-critical, and other entities identified in the EOs, are legally required to develop and implement COVID-19 Preparedness Plans (also referred to as “Plan” or “Plans”). Under the EOs, a “business” and “businesses” include entities that employ or engage workers, including private-sector entities, public-sector entities, non-profit entities, and state, county, and local governments. “Worker” and “workers” are broadly defined by the EOS to include owners, proprietors, employees, contractors, vendors, volunteers, and interns.

For purposes of this Plan Guidance, “other entities” includes those entities identified in the EOs that are not covered by the definition of a “business” but are also required by an EO to develop and implement Plans. Other entities include places of public accommodation, establishments, institutions, facilities, venues, and organizers identified in the EOs. Plan Guidance is designed to protect workers, customers, and other members of the public from the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

This Plan Guidance constitutes the “Plan Guidance” referred to in EO 21-01 and applies to all identified businesses and other entities. Businesses and other entities must develop and implement COVID-19 Preparedness Plans that address the following:

- The requirements of EO 21-01,
- The requirements included in the Universal Plan Guidance for COVID-19 Preparedness Plans found at Stay Safe Guidance for All Business Entities (https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp), and
- The requirements included in this Plan Guidance that are applicable to their business or entity.

Unless clearly indicated that an action is recommended and included under “Recommendations,” businesses and other entities should understand that the Plan Guidance imposes legally enforceable requirements. In instances where a requirement uses language “to the extent possible,” the action is required, to the extent it is possible for the business or entity to implement the requirement.

Depending on the activities engaged in by a business or other entity, it may be required to comply with additional industry or activity specific plan guidance, such as plan guidance applicable to bars and restaurants, if the facility serves food and beverages or plan guidance applicable to businesses that provide personal services, if the facility has a hair salon.

Frequently Asked Questions have been posted to respond to questions about provisions of Executive Orders and Plan Guidance. The following is a link to current Frequently Asked Questions about Stay Safe MN (https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/faq.jsp).
Required plan sections

1. Use of face coverings
2. Maintaining 6 feet of social distance between people
3. Hand hygiene
4. Building and facilities
5. Cleaning and disinfecting
6. Training and communication
7. Providing in-home services
8. Shared transportation
9. Shared temporary housing
10. General considerations

Requirements and recommendations

1. Use of face coverings

Requirements

✓ Executive Order 20-81 requires all people to wear face coverings while indoors. In addition, staff must wear face coverings when outdoors in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained. For more information about face covering requirements, recommendations, and exceptions, refer to Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations under Executive Order 20-81 and 20-103 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).

✓ Ensure that all people, including staff, members, and visitors bring their own face coverings or be prepared to offer face coverings for use.

✓ Take steps to ensure that staff, members, and visitors wear face coverings for the duration of the service, event, or activity when indoors, and outdoors if unable to maintain 6 feet of distance from others. Leaders in your organization are strongly encouraged to guide people prior to and during services to ensure compliance with masking.

Recommendation

▪ Music is an integral part of many faith-based services, weddings, and funerals. Singing and instrumental music produced by woodwind or brass instruments are higher-risk activities for COVID-19 spread due to the aggressive expelling of respiratory droplets. Congregation singing is strongly discouraged during the COVID-19 pandemic. If choosing to provide live music of any kind, follow the Guidance for Music Activities and Performances During COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf).

BACK TO REQUIRED PLAN SECTIONS
2. Maintaining 6 feet of social distance between people

Recommendations

- Determine how to address arrivals after you have reached maximum capacity or if participants are not following the 6 feet of required distancing from others or masking requirements. Plan ahead as much as possible to avoid this situation, and prepare to implement your plan in real time.

- Adapt all practices during services, weddings, and funerals to avoid physical contact or passing objects between people (e.g., greetings, collection baskets, sharing of ceremonial objects), and maintain the required distance of six feet between people from different households.

- Communion for some faiths is a critical part of their ritual. For faith communities that cannot make communion a touch-free encounter, consider following:
  - Distribute communion hand-to-hand, not hand-to-mouth. Do not share cups.
  - Maintain the maximum distance possible between the communion distributor and the receiver.
  - Everyone involved must wear face coverings – the recipient should only remove the face covering after moving away from the distributor to self-administer communion.

- Implement usher-directed entering and exiting and markings (with tape or other materials) on the floor and seating area to maintain proper social distancing.

3. Hand hygiene

Recommendation

- Provide hand sanitizer and tissues at the entrance, in each seating area section, and other prominent locations.

4. Buildings and facilities

Recommendations

- Use different entrances, pre-arrange staggered arrival and departure times, and use signage, floor markers, and other ways to direct foot traffic in the building and designated waiting areas, and to avoid congestion at entry and exit points and common areas.

- Evaluate and make changes to space, configuration, and movement through the space to allow for distancing in all aspects of services and activities.
5. Cleaning and disinfecting

**Recommendations**

- Personal equipment, items used in rituals or services, microphones, computers, and other devices should not be shared or should be disinfected after each use.

- Sharing books, hymnals, and religious texts by people from one service to the next does not pose a significant risk of spreading COVID-19. Limit the sharing of these texts in close proximity to each other at the same time to those in your own household. Consider cleaning the covers of these objects along with other frequently touched items in your worship space as established in your cleaning schedule.

- If people’s faces come into contact with the floor, carpet or other surface during prayers, request that they bring their own rug, or provide a paper covering for one-time use and then disposal.

6. Training and communication

**Recommendations**

- Advise people who may be at higher risk for severe COVID-19 infection to strongly consider **not** attending services or events. People over 65 and people of any age with underlying medical conditions are at higher risk.

- Communicate with members and participants the health screening, distancing and masking requirements of your COVID-19 Plan prior to or at the start of the service, event, or gathering to inform them of their role in protecting themselves, staff, and others from the spread of COVID-19.

- Use websites, social media, pre-appointment phone calls, and other outlets to inform members of the steps being taken for their protection and the protection of staff.

- Use posters and signs to guide participants about how to comply with requirements and recommendations. [Materials and Resources for COVID-19 Response](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html).

- If your faith-based organization is contacted by Local Public Health or the Minnesota Department of Health regarding COVID-19 cases at your facility or an event led by your organization, it is strongly recommended that you **inform your membership** that there have been COVID-19 cases in attendance.

  - Ensure you are aware of your privacy obligations and do not disclose information (particularly information relating to specific people) that is considered private or confidential under state or federal law.

  - It will serve as a reminder for members to observe social distancing and masking when attending services or events to protect their own health and the health of others.

  - Notifying the members or participants that someone tested positive will alert them to get tested should they develop symptoms, and to stay home if they are not feeling well or waiting for test results.

7. Providing in-home services
   - Faith-based organizations often provide in-home services to their members and the community. Follow the Universal Requirements and the Guidance for Caring for People in their Homes (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf).

8. Shared transportation
   - For faith-based organizations that provide transportation, follow the Universal Requirements.

9. Shared temporary housing
   - The Universal Requirements for “Temporary labor camps and housing” may apply to faith-based organizations that offer temporary shelter to community members for reasons other than labor.

10. General considerations
    - As capacity and gathering size limits are set by Executive Orders for the faith-based organization sector, your community may choose to implement more restrictive practices regarding gathering size and limiting the types of gatherings offered, based on the risk tolerance of your community.
    - Continue virtual services, phone contact, and other outreach to vulnerable community members, even as other members engage in person. Due to their risk level, some of your members and staff may not feel comfortable resuming in-person contact for a longer period of time. Faith communities need to take steps to ensure that members do not experience negative consequences from those communities because of their decision of whether or not to attend services or events.

Related guidance documents

Guidance for Caring for People in Their Homes – for non-medical visits (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/visitingathome.pdf)

Planning Funeral and Memorial Services during COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/providers/mortsci/docs/planduringcovid.pdf)
Guidance for Hmong Funerals during COVID-19
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hmongfuneral.pdf)

Guidance for Vehicle Gatherings, Parades, and Drive-ins
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vehiclegather.pdf)

Music Activities and Performances During COVID-19
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf)

Gathering Requirements for Celebrations and Significant Life Events
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf)

Safer Holiday Celebrations during COVID-19
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/holidays.html)

For Sunday School or other youth programs that are not classroom style, seated events:
COVID-19 Prevention Guidance for Youth and Student Programs
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf)