

Recommendations for a Safe Return to Worship

PROTECTING
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GOOD[®]



As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic progressed, many houses of worship suspended in-person gatherings according to government mandates or recommendations to help limit the spread of the virus.

With [states and local communities beginning to ease restrictions](#), houses of worship are considering how and when to resume gathering for services and other activities. Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)¹ recommends that insureds comply with all state and local laws and ordinances related to COVID-19, take necessary safety precautions to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and follow the CDC guidelines available on our [dedicated website](#).

Church Mutual® following recommendations and safeguards are presented for consideration by houses of worship as they consider reopening for public services.

PLANNING AND PROTOCOLS

When planning to reopen your building, remember that many things will change over time. Create a plan that takes those potential changes into account.

- Assign responsibility for coordinating with local health authorities and law enforcement.
- Assign responsibility for monitoring and incorporating government orders and guidance.

Safety and health protocols should be created before anyone re-enters your building. Once created, these protocols should be strictly followed for the safety of your staff, members and attenders. Protocol considerations include:

- Setting a capacity limit for the building and worship areas.
- Conducting temperature checks for members attending services.
- Requiring protective masks.
- 1-in-1-out system for tight spaces such as restrooms, counting rooms, offices, etc.
- Closing off less-frequented areas of the building during services.
- Making information available on dealing with potential protesters.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

BEFORE reopening, communicate new plans, procedures and protocols to your congregation. It is important to share details of plans as circumstances change, making information available to members and non-members alike.

- Communicate that those who are sick or who have been exposed to a COVID-19 patient within the last 14 days should worship remotely.
- Communicate to those who are 60 or older about a special senior service time or the option to worship remotely.
- Communicate to those who are at risk due to an underlying medical condition to worship remotely.

Get the word out to help better prepare your congregation for new changes — consider communicating via:

- Email.
- Social media postings.
- Telephone or automated calls.
- Signage on building doors.
- Content or special posts on website.
- Local newspapers.

Continue to offer livestream or other remote worship service options for those who are sick, high(er) risk, have been exposed to a COVID-19 patient within the last 14 days or are uncomfortable gathering in person at this time.

PREPARING TO REOPEN YOUR BUILDING

Building Preparation

- Conduct a thorough [facility inspection/walk through](#) to check on the safety of your building before it is reopened:
 - ✓ Focus on slip, trip and fall hazards.
 - ✓ Consider overgrowth and other issues stemming from building vacancy.
 - ✓ Restart systems and reset thermostats and lights.
 - ✓ Get spring HVAC (professional) maintenance completed.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the building and contents before opening.
- Ensure cleaning supplies and disinfectant have been ordered and are on hand.
- Make sure hand sanitizer and/or hand wipes are available throughout the building.
- Post signs regarding social distancing, safety measures and handwashing.
- Provide face coverings for staff, volunteers and attendees per CDC guidance, as well as gloves for ushers or greeters who will be opening or propping open doors.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Practices

- Establish frequency and proper protocol for cleaning and disinfecting areas both before and after services.
- Implement daily and weekly cleaning schedules for frequently touched items or equipment such as:
 - ✓ Door, door handles.
 - ✓ Light switches.
 - ✓ Chairs and tables.
 - ✓ Music stands and musical instruments.
 - ✓ Sound board.
- Limit areas and items needing to be disinfected.
 - ✓ Offices and working areas with shared equipment.
 - ✓ Worship area and materials.
 - ✓ Study rooms.
 - ✓ Conference rooms.
 - ✓ Restrooms.
 - ✓ Play areas and equipment.

KEEPING YOUR PEOPLE SAFE

Maintaining Social Distance

If there is a numerical limitation on large gatherings, determine how best to implement those restrictions. Whether or not numerical limitations are in place, social distancing measures should be incorporated as you reopen your building for services.

- Maintain six-foot distance.
- Consider roping off areas and/or removing seats in sanctuary.
- Encourage seating as a family unit.
- Dismiss in an orderly way at the end of the service to maintain social distancing.
- Extend transition times between services to allow for physical distancing.
- Offer additional services to spread out congregants.
- Consider creative venues to hold services such as outdoors or in the parking lot.

Staff and Volunteer Training

It is important to make sure all staff and volunteers are aware of, trained on and comfortable with established plans, procedures and protocols your organization is implementing. See below for example roles and considerations.

Leaders/Ushers

- Social distancing requirements.
- Information on modified worship protocols.
- Addressing attendees that appear ill.
- Addressing potential protestors.

Volunteers

- Social distancing requirements.
- Personal protection recommendations.
- Cleaning protocols.
- Masking and gloving protocols.

Postpone Shared Practices Involving Physical Contact

Consider non-contact alternatives to, or temporarily postpone:

- "Passing of the peace" or greeting time.
- Distributing printed bulletins.
- Communion.
- Passing offering baskets.
- Use of hymnals, pew Bibles or attendance pads.
- Coffee hour, refreshments or shared food service.

Safeguarding High-Risk Groups

Elderly/at-risk

- Consider instituting a separate, smaller "senior service" for those age 60 and above and/or those with underlying medical conditions.
- Limit volunteer participation to activities that do not involve physical interaction with others.

Nursery/childcare

Consider postponing nursery/childcare at the present time. If you plan to offer nursery/childcare, follow CDC guidelines for childcare settings and consider the following additional safeguards:

- Implement social distancing strategies.
- Intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts.
- Modify drop-off and pick-up procedures.
- Implement screening procedures upon arrival.
- Maintain an adequate ratio of staff to children to ensure safety.
- When feasible, staff and older children should wear face coverings.

Youth/Sunday school

- Implement safeguards such as social distancing, dividing into smaller groups and enhanced cleaning practices.
- Consider incorporating outdoor activities when feasible.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Limit gathering sizes for **weddings** and **funerals** based on current [federal guidelines](#).
- Postpone **playground use** or implement additional safeguards and/or limitations.
- Consider postponing group activities such as **mission trips** and **vacation bible school (VBS)**.
- Keep **security** top of mind — economically and emotionally stressful times can lead to desperate acts.

RESOURCES

Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Recommendations for Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

EPA's Registered Antimicrobial Products for Use Against Novel Coronavirus
<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

Federal Guidelines for Opening America Up Again
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Opening-Up-America-Again.pdf>

Resources for Community- and Faith-Based Leaders
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>

Basic Guide for Returning to your Church Building after COVID-19 (Georgia Baptist Mission Board)
<https://gabaptist.org/reopening-your-church-building/>

Guidelines for Returning to In-Person Worship Services (National Apostolic Christian Leadership Conference)
<https://www.upci.org/file/177/Guidelines%20For%20Returning%20to%20In-Person%20Worship%20Services.pdf>

COVID-19 Suggested Church Reopening Guidelines (Christian Law Association)
<https://christianlaw.org/covid-19-suggested-church-reopening-guidelines/>

Post-Coronavirus Facility Re-Opening Checklist (Smart Church Solutions)
<https://try.space.cool/post-coronavirus-facility-reopening-checklist/>

Hartford Steam Boiler Equipment Checklists and Logs
<https://www.munichre.com/hsb/en/products/commercial-lines-insurers/equipment-breakdown/commercial-equipment-breakdown/logs-and-checklists.html>

HERE TO HELP!

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is changing the way organizations operate. If you have questions about safely returning to worship, contact Risk Control Central at (800) 554-2642 (Option 4) Ext. 5213 or email riskconsulting@churchmutual.com.

Visit coronavirus.churchmutual.com for more COVID-19 resources.

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