

# Safely Returning to Worship Q&A:

PROTECTING  
THE GREATER  
GOOD



## GENERAL QUESTIONS

### How will we know it is safe to gather in worship services?

The first step is understanding when worship service gatherings are allowed in your state and under what limitations. Once you understand what is lawful, consider consulting with local public health officials to determine what is safe. Recognize that no strategy, no matter how well followed, will fully eliminate the risk. The goal is to minimize. Remember, community transmission is a major way the virus continues to spread.

### How do we know which authority to listen to?

Federal, state and even local guidance can be different. Do your best to keep in touch with all. The best place for guidance on many safety issues is the CDC.

### How might small churches or congregations that are almost completely high-risk manage all these needs well and responsibly?

First evaluate your demographics. If you have a large portion of members who are "at risk" due to age or other health issues, it would be wise to continue worshipping remotely. You could also consider linking up with other larger churches and/or your regional association HQ and use their resources until things become clearer relative to the virus.

### How should we handle people arriving at church via public transportation?

This should not be substantially different from those arriving by other means. Congregants should be encouraged to test themselves before leaving home. If they are feeling sick, have a cough, temperature or loss of smell, they should stay home. You can take temperatures, practice social distancing and require wearing masks as with other congregants.

### Should we be taking temperatures of people?

Thermal screening can be helpful in identifying those who are exhibiting a fever, but it could create a false sense of security. Many people infected with coronavirus can be asymptomatic and do not have a temperature. Encourage people to take their temperatures at home. Further, if a worshiper or employee has any symptoms (e.g. loss of smell, cough, sore throat or fever), they should self-quarantine.

## LIABILITY

### What is the church's financial liability? Can we be sued if we reopen? What will the liability of the church be if someone contracts COVID-19 at a church gathering?

You can be sued at any time for activities that occur on your premises. See the attached COVID-19 General Liability document and visit <https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com/resource/about-insurance-coverage/>.

## CLEANING

**Our church building has been sitting empty for two months. What type of cleaning is necessary?**

See the CDC guidelines on cleaning and disinfecting at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>.

**What is involved in a deep cleaning?**

Deep cleaning involves cleaning surfaces using soap and water followed by using disinfectant. Cleaning with soap and water reduces the amount of germs, dirt and impurities on surfaces. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces.

Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use. High-touch surfaces include tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc. For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>.

**Do we need to deep clean daily if we only plan to use a room/area once a week?**

Generally, it is understood the virus would not remain viable on surfaces for more than three days, so it is not unreasonable to disinfect rooms once per week if there is no other usage.

Continue routine cleaning and disinfecting as they are an important part of reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Normal routine cleaning with soap and water alone can reduce risk of exposure and is a necessary step before you disinfect dirty surfaces. Surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, phones, light switches and faucets, should be cleaned and disinfected daily at the very least. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use.

**How can we gather supplies needed to support proper disinfection when we can't access supplies at local stores? Which materials do you recommend as the best for this purpose?**

Other than online sources, you might consider reaching out to congregation members or local businesses or nonprofits who have a supply. The CDC has specific resources regarding materials, supplies and more at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>.

**I have looked for hand sanitizer and disinfectant cleaner for over a month. None is available locally or online (without buying so much in bulk that we will never use it all). Is there a resource for this?**

Visit the following link to learn more about EPA-approved disinfectants: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>.

When EPA-approved disinfectants are not available, alternative disinfectants can be used, such as 1/3 cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water or 70% alcohol solutions. Do not mix bleach or other cleaning and disinfection products together. This can cause fumes that may be very dangerous to breathe in. Bleach solutions will be effective for disinfection up to 24 hours. Keep all disinfectants out of the reach of children.

**Is there any research or information on using hand sanitizer as an alternative to washing hands with soap and water?**

Information on hand sanitizer use as an alternative to washing hands with soap and water is provided by the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html>.

## **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS**

### **Isn't it a violation of health codes to allow people in without bathroom access?**

Discuss with your local public health authorities. While restroom and drinking fountain access are typically required by code, variances may be granted given the exigent circumstances involving COVID-19. Bathroom access should follow all other CDC guidelines. A rule of thumb would be to have one person in at a time.

### **Do you recommend avoiding turning on ceiling fans that can potentially circulate droplets around the sanctuary?**

This is not a specific recommendation but there should be no concern in keeping ceiling fans off. Building staff should make sure that building HVAC systems are working properly and, if feasible, increase the amount of outdoor air coming into the building.

### **Is it safe to do construction works in the building now?**

If construction/renovation activity is permitted in your state, this may proceed as long as the contractor is meeting all state, local and federal requirements and guidelines.

### **How should we handle parking lots?**

You should have people in parking areas that help maintain social distancing. Cones or other markings would be appropriate. Consider restricting parking to every other space to assist with maintaining distancing.

### **How should we handle elevator usage?**

Elevator usage should be limited to one person at a time or to family members who have been quarantined together. Elevators should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, including between services if possible.

### **Should we keep our kitchen operating? Can we still serve coffee/donuts?**

Consider suspending kitchen operations and food-related activities for the time being.

### **Can people use water fountains?**

If codes allow (check with public health officials), consider turning off common water fountains and provide individual bottled water, if feasible.

## **PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

### **Should we consider providing items such as gloves to parishioners upon returning to worship to help minimize the physical touching of surfaces such as doors and chairs and reduce the spread of germs?**

While the CDC currently recommends face coverings in public settings where social distancing is difficult to maintain, the CDC has made no recommendation that the general public wear disposable gloves to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Gloves are recommended for staff and volunteers who will be in contact with frequently touched items such as door handles, light switches, etc.

## WORSHIP SERVICES

### **Are there any guidelines for parking lot drive-in services?**

Maintain social distancing and comply with federal, state and local guidance.

### **Is it a good idea to consider registering in advance?**

This will help you plan and set up for services. When registrations reach the safe capacity of your facility, encourage additional interested parishioners to select a different service. Continue live, web-based communication of services. Encourage online giving. Passing a plate is discouraged as money can carry the virus.

### **What about tracking persons who attended? Do we need to take attendance?**

You don't need to, but this could be beneficial for public health authorities if someone who has attended your house of worship is subsequently diagnosed with COVID-19. A useful resource can be found at [PastorsToolbox.com](https://www.pastorstoolbox.com).

### **How should we deal with Communion services?**

Consider suspending communion for the time being or utilizing individual, single-use communion sets.

### **Could you please address singing – should it be allowed? If not at the outset, when?**

General guidance right now is to limit congregational singing and encourage soloist and pre-recorded music for a short period of time. Depending on your location and population characteristics, it could return to normal sooner.

Also, Chorus America and the Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) have provided a webinar about the safety of singing in general and the conclusion is that it is not safe at this time. Please see: <https://www.chorusamerica.org/resource/top-resource/singing-reopening-safely-time-coronavirus>.

### **Can you address the issue of instrumentalists such as trumpets and trombones?**

As for musical instruments like trumpets and trombones, it's best to hold off for the time being. Guitar and piano, not being wind instruments, are likely OK.

## CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

### **What are your recommendations for children's activities? What about kids' ministry and nursery care?**

Consider suspending these for the time being.

### **If we have a daycare in our church, should we prolong opening due to higher risk or put in extra protocols?**

Yes, consider keeping the daycare closed until the community is in a phase where reopening is recommended by local public health authorities.

## SPACING AND SEATING

**If you can fit 100 people spaced out with the 10x10 space per person, could you meet with a group that size while the guidance is 25 or fewer for gatherings, given that there are more people at stores?**

If public health authorities have placed a limitation on gathering size, the house of worship should follow the direction of local authorities.

### **How do you calculate square footage for personal spacing?**

Six feet of separation distance requires 113 square feet per person (area of a circle =  $\pi \times \text{radius}^2$ ).

While a single person requires 113 square feet of space to form a circle with a 6-foot radius around themselves, factoring for overlap of individuals' circles and recognizing that a person is not a pinpoint reduces the needed radius to four feet for each person. A 4-foot radius allows one foot of distance for one-half of the person's body and then three feet to the next person's circle. That three feet from the first person added to the three feet from the second person creates six feet of distance between the two. A circle with a 4-foot radius requires approximately 50 square feet of space.

Cohabiting family members do not require six feet of distance between them. Calculate square footage required for a family by starting with the area required for one person and then add 25% of that amount for each additional cohabiting family member.

### **Should families sit in clusters in the sanctuary?**

Yes, it is acceptable for families that have been in self-isolation together to sit as a family unit. This reduces the square footage requirement discussed above.

### **How should we handle queuing in the lobby?**

Suggestions include marking 6-foot separations on the floor, and even starting the process outside in an open area, then allowing people to enter the building one by one. Allow families to stay together since they have been quarantined together. They should be advised to sit together in church.

### **How do we safely distance in pews and not feel totally disrupted with tape or other markers indicating where to sit?**

One way is to have families that have been isolating together sit as a family unit. For rows that are not cordoned off, some houses of worship plan to post signs with green check marks to indicate places to sit, rather than focusing on places to avoid.

### **Most of our congregations have lots of room to spread out in their sanctuaries. For those of us who need to bring in people in shifts for worship, what do we need to do?**

Consider a registration process, ideally online, to help control the number of worshippers who will attend any one service. Implement the standard precautions: social distancing, masks, limit the number of people in rooms, allow families to sit together, rely on technology to view services in different rooms in the building, continue to encourage watching at home, clean and disinfect regularly, as some examples.

## CAMPS

### Recommendations about summer camps for 2020?

Camps are rightfully concerned with how the current COVID-19 crisis may impact preparation and planning for camp season. Visit <https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com/resource/camps/> for more camp-specific information and resources.

The American Camp Association has also created a hub for camp administrators and directors that includes financial, staffing, human resources and online learning resources at <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/coronavirus-information-camps>.

## HERE TO HELP!

If you have questions about safely returning to worship, contact Risk Control Central.

Call: (800) 554-2642 (Option 4) Ext. 5213

Email: [riskconsulting@churchmutual.com](mailto:riskconsulting@churchmutual.com)

Visit [coronavirus.churchmutual.com](https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com) for more COVID-19 resources.

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