



Religious Education/Youth Ministry

Operating Framework for the 2021/22 Program Year

Returning to near pre-pandemic full operation

Updated August 2021

Protecting the health and safety of our program participants, parish staff and volunteers while providing them with an excellent, in-person faith formation experience remain our priorities. Based on the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), consultation from our team of medical advisors, and our Archdiocesan COVID-19 Task Force, we plan a return to largely normal, pre-pandemic operations while maintaining select safety protocols to ensure a healthy, in-person environment. As with last year's programming, we will continue to follow the same protocols set forth by the Archdiocese's Office for Catholic Schools.

Guiding principles for the 2021/22 year

1. The safety and wellbeing of all religious education (RE) and youth ministry (YM) participants, staff and volunteers remain our top priorities.
2. The progress of the COVID-19 pandemic in Illinois remains unpredictable. We continue to consult with public health, education and civil authorities and modify requirements during the year as conditions, mandates and guidance change. We are committed to providing an integrated and balanced perspective.
3. We will regularly review the Framework and communicate updates to families in a full and timely manner.
4. Faithful citizenship is key. We expect our families to take personal responsibility for the common good and their own safety. Taking every precaution to reduce the spread of the virus is an act of charity toward our sisters and brothers in Christ, particularly those too young to receive vaccine protection. As Pope Francis has said, "I believe that morally everyone must take the vaccine. It is the moral choice because it is about your life but also the lives of others."

Framework Details

The Archdiocese of Chicago and the Office of Lifelong Formation reserve the right to modify these guidelines.

Masking

Given the new evidence on the COVID-19 Delta variant and the rising infection and hospitalization rates, the **State of Illinois has mandated the wearing of masks indoors for all school personnel and Pre-K through grade 12 students regardless of vaccination status.** This guidance is consistent with that of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Both have updated their guidance to recommend universal indoor masking when indoors for people over the age of 2 regardless of vaccination status. While we recognize that the preference of some of our staff and families is for masks to be optional for vaccinated individuals, we will follow mandates and guidance in force.

Therefore:

- **In keeping with State of Illinois mandates and with the recommendations of public health authorities, we will start the program year requiring masks for all individuals while inside parish and school buildings, regardless of vaccination status.**
- As conditions improve across our regions and the mandates and guidance of civil authorities and public health agencies allow, we will regularly evaluate whether to continue to require masks for all individuals in our parishes and schools.
- We know many parents, volunteers and staff have expressed a preference for masks to be optional for those who are vaccinated. When conditions allow, our preference is to transition to a policy under which vaccinated individuals will not be required to wear a mask indoors.

This strategy will help us monitor whether our return to near pre-pandemic operations is working. It is also important to note that masking at the start of the program year while removing other mitigations is an important safeguard for high-risk volunteers and staff.

Please note the following guidance on masking requirements:

- Individuals who are masked and three feet from a confirmed case indoors are not considered close contacts in the new CDC guidance. Therefore, consistent and correct mask use will drastically reduce the number of participants, volunteers and staff needing to quarantine. Under these new guidelines, only the positive case should need to quarantine.
- No masks are required outdoors, regardless of vaccination status.

Returning to near pre-pandemic full operation

The following may return to near-pre-pandemic full operations with adherence to guidance outlined in the rest of this framework:

- Religious Ed classrooms arranged without cohorting
- No pandemic-related arrival and departure requirements (wellness checks, such as the M-A-T-H procedure, staggered drop-off/pick-up schedules, or dedicated entrance/exit doors)

Vaccinations

All eligible participants, volunteers and staff are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as an act of Charity.

- Fully vaccinated individuals who have 1.) been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and 2.) are asymptomatic are not required to quarantine. Proof of vaccination will be required to avoid quarantines.
- Fully vaccinated people are required to isolate if they test positive.

- When we shift to a mask optional policy for vaccinated individuals, proof of vaccination will be required to allow individuals to remove masks and prevent an unmasked individual from being quarantined. We recommend gathering proof of vaccination with your start-of-program paperwork to allow for a seamless transition to a mask optional policy when conditions warrant. Proof of vaccinations must be gathered and stored using the same process as all individual medical records.

Physical Distancing and Classroom Seating

It is important to maintain three feet of physical distancing wherever possible (classrooms, activities, Mass, etc.). Specifically:

- Classrooms:
 - Arrangement of desks should allow for three feet physical distancing whenever possible from center point of chair to center point of chair; however, distancing and furniture placement should not inhibit best academic practices.
 - Group tables and other furniture arrangements can be used; there is no longer a requirement that participants all face the same direction.
 - Use of rugs and area carpets is permissible.
 - Seating charts should be maintained in all classrooms in the event they are needed for contact tracing purposes.

Hygiene

Good respiratory and hand hygiene must be practiced by all individuals. To help them comply with good practices:

- Hand sanitizer should be readily available in all classrooms, offices and common areas and regular use should be strongly encouraged.
- Staff, volunteers and participants should use hand sanitizer every time they enter a room.
- Everyone should be regularly encouraged to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene (covering coughs and sneezes, frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer).
- Water bottles should be used instead of drinking directly from water fountains.

Ventilation

Improvements made to ventilation systems will help reduce COVID-19 and other disease transmission. When safe/practical to do so:

- Open windows and doors to promote cross ventilation.
- Place fans as close as possible to open windows or doors (blowing out) to promote ventilation.
- Use portable air purifiers whenever opening windows is not feasible and/or there is not a filtered, central HVAC system.

Daily Cleaning

Proper cleaning and disinfection, including wiping down desks and high traffic areas at least once each day the program is in session, will help reduce the presence and spread of any germs.

Outdoor Instruction / Activities

The risk of transmission is considerably lower outdoors than indoors. Whenever possible, consider using outdoor spaces for classes, lunch or other activities.

Safety Protocol Signage

Other than mask reminders, no safety/protocol posters or decals will be distributed this school year.

- 2020/21 posters should be removed if they are no longer relevant (i.e., the M-A-T-H signs, etc.).
- Floor decals can remain as physical distancing is always a good idea.
- Directional arrows denoting one-way traffic can be removed.
- Plastic partitions can be removed; however, they may be retained in parish/school offices if preferred by staff.

Isolation and Quarantine Procedures

All individuals must remain at home when sick or experiencing any symptoms to minimize the chance of spreading COVID-19 or other germs and viruses. Specific to COVID-19 quarantines:

Symptomatic or COVID-19 Positive Individuals

- All symptomatic individuals must remain home, regardless of vaccination status. Families are obligated to report COVID-19 diagnoses, or close contact cases, to their parish office and/or program leadership office.
- If symptoms last longer than 24 hours, an individual must receive a negative COVID-19 test or alternative medical diagnosis prior to returning to the RE/YM program.
- Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days from the date symptoms first appeared or the date of a positive test result.

Quarantine Procedures for Close Contacts

- Participants, volunteers and staff who are masked and maintain three feet of physical distancing from the positive individual do not need to quarantine.
- Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine if they are asymptomatic.
- Unvaccinated individuals who are close contacts to positive **household members**, including siblings, must quarantine.

Quarantine guidelines continue to be fluid and we expect to issue updated guidance closer to the start of the program year.

All close contacts of presumed COVID-positive persons and those cases confirmed COVID-19 positive must be reported by the RE/YM program director via an **updated Intake Form** to the Archdiocesan Case Management Team, who will conduct the contact tracing and report the case to the local health authorities.

Travel

- We will follow the **City of Chicago Travel Advisory** for all RE/YM parish programs, whether they are located in Chicago, Lake County or Cook County.
- Domestic Travel
 - Fully vaccinated individuals do not need post-travel COVID-19 testing or self-quarantines as long as they are not symptomatic and provide proof of vaccination.
 - Unvaccinated individuals must follow the prevailing post-travel quarantine recommendations when traveling to Orange States. This currently means a 10-day quarantine OR proof of a negative test no earlier than 72 hours prior to returning to Chicago (or anytime post return, though an individual must quarantine until a negative test result is received). A negative test = no quarantine required.
- International Travel
 - The CDC currently requires a negative COVID-19 test or proof of recovery to board a plane to the United States. Because of this negative test, there is no required quarantine upon arrival, regardless of vaccination status.