Recommendations for a Safe Return to Worship

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) recommends that insurers 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.

PREVENTION

Transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) takes place through person-to-person contact and thing-to-person contact. Knowing this information helps inform tools and preparation needed to successfully reopen.

Social distance and disinfection are primary tools that help reduce the risk of transmission/spread. Organizations should establish protocols and procedures around adequate distancing, as well as enhanced cleaning practices.

PREPARATION

Planning

Recognize things will likely change over time:

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

Ensure your plan applies to different circumstances:

- Staff and volunteers serve others.
- Events and activities bring people together.
- Each space is different in area and contents.
- Some should not gather.
- Some may become ill at your facility.

Plans should explore alternative worship solutions:

- Projecting the order of service, readings and songs.
- Substituting offering baskets for collection boxes or online giving.
- Weighing communion alternatives such as single use, sanitary preparation and distribution.
- Avoiding shared use of microphones by worship service celebrants and musicians.

\*Church Mutual is a stock insurer whose policyholders are members of the parent mutual holding company formed on 1/1/82. SI = a stock insurer.

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Critical Numbers for Planning

- Six feet of distance = 113 square feet per person
- The virus can live up to three days on surfaces
- It takes 2-10 minutes of contact to disinfect (see EPA list)
- Symptoms show in 7-14 days
Supplies
Gather supplies needed to support proper disinfection and cleaning practices.

Disinfecting supplies
- Disinfecting agents for your facility.
- Hand sanitizer for staff, volunteers and attendees.

Covering supplies
- Masks and gloves for staff and volunteers.
- Face coverings for attendees.

Communication
Communicate your plan via multiple channels — email, website, newspaper, etc. — prior to reopening.
- Share details of the plan as circumstances change.
- Make the plan available to members and non-members alike.
- Reinforce message that persons who are ill or higher risk should continue worshipping remotely.

Instructional materials
Develop on-site instructional materials such as signs or projected images to ...
- Directions to aid the flow of people and vehicles.
- Information on physical distancing and face coverings.
- Messaging to stay home if sick.
- Importance of handwashing and hygiene practices.

Training
Train staff, leaders, ushers and volunteers on established plans and procedures for services and gatherings, including:
- Admission criteria.
- Social distancing requirements.
- Isolation protocol.
- Cleaning agents and processes.

IMPLEMENTATION
Before and between services
- Disinfect the worship area.
- Disinfect worship materials such as microphones and music stands.
- Disinfect restrooms and other common areas.
- Replenish disinfecting and covering supplies.
During services
- At entrances, prop doors open (weather permitting), apply admission criteria and provide hand sanitizer.
- Maintain planned spacing for seating.
- Modify “passing the peace” or greeting time to avoid physical contact.

After services
- Dismiss congregants in a way that maintains social distancing both inside and outside the building.
- Disinfect your worship area, materials, rooms used and frequently touched items such as doors, light switches, chains, etc.
- Provide hand sanitizer and new protective equipment (masks and gloves) to those that have postservice responsibilities.

Children’s activities
- Disinfect activity areas and equipment before, between and after activities.
- Establish admission criteria and have parents drop children off outside the activity area.
- Plan for activities that maintain appropriate spacing.

Office operations
- Create accountability for yourself and your coworkers regarding established protocols.
- Maintain physical distance and wear face coverings to protect each other.
- Consider having office spaces deep-cleaned on a weekly basis.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Weddings and funerals
Follow federal guidelines established around gathering sizes.

Playground use
Consider discontinuing use of playgrounds and equipment at present or implement additional safeguards and limitations.

Vacation bible school (VBS)
Think about postponing vacation bible school (VBS) and other large gatherings and events until 2021.

Mission trips
Look at postponing all scheduled mission trips at present.

Security
Keep security considerations top of mind as economically and emotionally stressful times can lead to desperate acts.
RESOURCES

Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility

Recommendations for Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

EPA’s Registered Antimicrobial Products for Use Against Novel Coronavirus
https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/files/disinfectantsuseagainstsars-cov2

Federal Guidelines for Opening America Up Again

Resources for Community- and Faith-Based Leaders

Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open

Basic Guide for Returning to your Church Building after COVID-19 (Georgia Baptist Mission Board)
https://gbaptist.org/reopeningyourchurchbuilding/

Guidelines for Returning to In-Person Worship Services (National Apostolic Christian Leadership Conference)
https://www.naplusa.org/file/117/Guidelines%26%238211%3B%20For%20Returning%20to%20In%20Person%20Worship%20Services.pdf

COVID-19 Suggested Church Reopening Guidelines (Christian Law Association)

Post-Coronavirus Facility Re-Opening Checklist (Smart Church Solutions)

Hartford Steam Boiler Equipment Checklists and Logs

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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