



Coronavirus Disease 2019

COVID-19

GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

The safest option to protect the most people and prevent the spread of the virus is **to offer services online** during this phase of the pandemic.

We strongly recommended that those who are at higher-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g. 65 years and older, chronic lung disease, serious heart conditions, immunocompromised, severe obesity, diabetes, liver disease, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, etc.) continue using online options.

Because spiritual needs cannot always be met through online programming, some spiritual leaders may decide to manage the risk and re-open portions of their in-person services. These guidelines and recommendations will help protect the health of those who choose to attend religious and spiritual gatherings in-person during this time. These guidelines and recommendations apply to houses of worship and settings where life-rites occur, such as funeral homes or venues for wedding ceremonies. Social receptions for those events still must follow mass gathering limitations.

Required guidelines

Capacity limitations

- Indoors: Maximum 50% capacity or up to 50 people per room.
- Outdoors: Groups from different households spaced at least 6 feet apart, up to local capacity levels.

Physical / social distancing

- Entering and exiting buildings should include at least 6 feet physical distancing by party. A “party” includes members of a household who live together.
- Seating in houses of worship should be arranged in such a way as to maintain at least 6 feet of distance *in every direction* between individuals or parties.
- Faith communities are encouraged to add additional services to accommodate the need for physical distancing, as well as consider shortening the duration of services to minimize exposure time.
- Houses of worship should have a plan for distancing requirements in restrooms (either one person at a time or close off multiple stalls in between the stalls that can be used).
- Multiple large rooms in a facility can be used as long as each space can follow ALL the guidelines and each room has 4 walls and a door. Service times may have to be staggered to accomplish this. Leaders must attend to distancing requirements, available restrooms, separate entrance/exit doors, and timely cleaning practices.

Cleaning practices

- Follow the [Colorado Department of Health and Environment’s Cleaning Guidance.](#)
- Restrooms should be cleaned at minimum between each service.
- Any metal or plastic on chairs or surfaces must be disinfected between services.

- Additional resources can be found at [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) - Get Your Community- and-Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)

Strongly recommended guidelines

Masks

- Follow the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's [Guidance for wearing masks/cloth face coverings.](#)
- We strongly encourage that masks be worn at all times while on the premises by staff, volunteers, and congregants attending worship services. Children 2 and under, those with trouble breathing, or those unable to remove a mask without assistance should not wear a mask.
- Houses of worship should have extra masks on hand for visitors who do not have their own. Any item provided to be worn must be disposable or fully sanitized before and after each use.

Pre-registration

- Use a pre-registration system, social media platform, or private messaging to distribute the number of worshippers across the services being offered (in accordance with the physical distancing guidelines).
- Develop [a protocol for symptom screening](#): self-reporting, health surveys, or on-site checks. Anyone with any symptoms may not attend.
- Consider allowing for 10% capacity at each service for “walk-ups” who do not have access to the technology to sign up or do not know how to use it.
- Consider who will manage additional participants at the door.

Employees and volunteers

- Upon arrival, all employees and volunteers should have their temperature taken and symptoms screened. Anyone with a temperature over 100.4 or showing [COVID-19 symptoms](#) should go home. [Sample Screening Form.](#)
- Masks and gloves must be worn.
- Training should be provided on sanitation. If anyone has symptoms, follow [workplace outbreak guidelines.](#)

Directing movement of people (entry / exit Doors)

- Employees or volunteers (ushers) should provide physical distance directions for where to walk and which areas are available for seating/standing as the service begins and ends.
- Display clear signage in languages worshippers understand.
- Attendees should enter and exit the facility as directed: one person/household party at a time adhering to physical distancing guidelines.
- Mark the floor of the worship space (aisles), the lobby, and the area outside the entrance and exit with physical distancing markers to cue people where to stand/wait.
- Avoid any close congregating or crowding before, during, or after the service.
- Use separate doors for entry and exit. If only one door is available, ensure times of services are spread out enough that the exit of one service can be completed before entry for the next service is allowed.
- Enable people to stay 6 feet apart while waiting to enter the building. This can include ground markings, or other tactics like encouraging people to remain in their cars.

- Throughout the service, people need to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from all persons not in their household/party.
- After services, people should return directly to vehicles, maintaining at least 6 feet of distance from others.

Create a “touchless” experience

Where possible, houses of worship are encouraged to create a plan which allows for worshippers to avoid all contact with surfaces.

- **Doors:** Doors entering the building and inside the building should either remain propped open or be opened/closed by employees/volunteers throughout the entire process.
- **Hand sanitizer:** Locate touchless hand-sanitizer units at the front door and throughout the facility.
- **Greeters:** Greeters and attendees must greet while maintaining at least 6 feet of distance at all times and refrain from shaking hands or any personal contact.
- **Designated standing room:** Where possible, some spaces can be designated for those who desire to stand during the service with proper physical distancing (so as not to touch the chairs).
- **Communion:** Direct interaction between faith leaders and congregants should be touch-free. Individually packaged communion is the safest option. When communion is not individually wrapped, the container for the host/bread should remain covered and uncontaminated during blessings and prayers. Distribution should be touch-free. Common cups are very high-risk and should not be used.
- **Offering:** Offering boxes or baskets should be attached to the wall or set at an entrance or exit of the worship space in a way that attendees do not have to touch it when they give. Do not pass baskets or plates among attendees.
- **Hymnals/religious books:** These items should be removed and photocopies should be made available that can be discarded after one individual use, if permissible in that faith tradition. Consider projecting materials on a wall/screen for congregations to read together. Best practice is for worshippers to bring their own religious books and/or use technology to project lyrics, scriptures, liturgies, etc., so no physical copies are necessary, or provide links that can be used to get to the materials on a cell phone.
- **Contact with religious objects:** At this phase of re-opening, there should be minimal communal contact with objects of religious or spiritual significance. If possible, consider wearing gloves or other protection while handling.
- **Food and beverage:** No food or beverage may be offered by the house of worship. No food or beverage may be brought in by individual attendees to share with others.

Presenting speakers/singers/choirs

- Masks or facecoverings should be worn to the greatest extent possible, as loud speaking and singing appear to spread COVID-19 further.
- Speakers, preachers, presenters, and singers should move considerably further back (25-27 feet) than the prescribed 6 feet of physical distance to maximize distance between them and the front row of attendees.
- Choirs should not be used at this time given the strong risk of viral spread from singing.

Children’s and youth programming

- Children and youth may attend religious services with parent(s)/caregiver(s) who feel confident they can enforce at least 6 feet of distance between children from different households.

- Particular services should be catered to families and publicized accordingly in order to mitigate the risk of cross-generational transmission.
- Houses of worship that would like to provide programming for children must demonstrate an ability to adhere to all [guidelines for chld care centers](#) published by CDPHE. Youth programming, separate from the religious services, may occur but with a strong recommendation for meeting outdoors, providing at least 6 feet of distance between parties from all sides, and the use of masks by all participants.

Other areas of recommendation/consideration

Outdoor services

- These services are allowed if all applicable guidelines listed in this document can be followed. Special consideration must be given to directing people from the parking lots to the outdoor setting while physical distancing, as well as indicating where they can sit/stand.
- Guests should bring their own lawn chair/blanket to minimize the shared use of chairs and other items (umbrellas, etc.).
- Masks and at least 6 feet of distance between parties is still required.
- Weddings that can follow outdoor service guidelines are allowed.

Security

- Unfortunately, hate groups have used the fear of the pandemic to promote discrimination -- particularly against Asian, Jewish and Muslim communities. Any plans for reopening should be made with an awareness of these types of events.

Muslim ablution

- Where possible it is recommended ablution occur privately at the attendees' place of residence before arriving at the mosque. If that is not possible, staff or volunteers should clean faucet handles and other items between each use.

Religious studies, small groups, and meetings

- Religious studies, book studies, and other small groups are strongly encouraged to continue to meet online.
- Staff might consider limited meetings in the religious facility with appropriate physical distancing and masks. Where possible these groups are encouraged to meet outdoors and to follow proper physical distancing guidelines and the use of masks.
- Religious facilities should follow the cleaning, movement, and mask guidance above.

Food pantries and other services

- These activities may occur at the religious facility assuming all the relevant guidelines listed in this document can be followed and additional CDPHE guidelines for specific service facilities are followed. When distributing items, the gatherings should remain at 10 or under in one room with physical distancing guidelines, masks, and cleaning.

Other sacred ceremonies

As with all other services offered, if all the above guidelines can be met, these events are permitted.

Additional Comments

- Please note, these are recommendations for June, and possibly July, based on current data.
- Houses of worship should immediately refer to the [health department's guidance](#) if there is deemed to be an outbreak in their community.
- Consider these recommendations as ways to protect your community and the general public. Do not try to find loopholes in order to bypass the recommendations. Be sure to check with your insurance company about liability around COVID-19 exposure in your facility.
- Areas that request and receive a variance from CDPHE can abide by the guidelines in the approved variance application.