Recommendations for a Safe Return to Worship

Preparation

PLANNING

- Assign responsibility for monitoring and incorporating government orders and guidance.
- Assign responsibility for coordinating with local health authorities and law enforcement.
- Provide leaders, staff and volunteers with masks and other protective equipment to wear while serving.
- Establish protocols for physical distancing before, during and after services including seating arrangements, modified worship practices and dismissal procedures.
- Continue offering online worship options for those who are sick, higher risk, have been exposed to a coronavirus (COVID-19) patient within the last 14 days or are otherwise uncomfortable gathering in person.
- Develop isolation protocols should a staff member, volunteer or attendee become ill at your facility.
- Minimize use of printed or hand-held materials such as bulletins, hymnals, bibles and attendance pads.
- Do not share equipment used for worship services such as microphones, etc.
- Minimize areas of your building(s) being used during services and gatherings to minimize disinfecting needs.
- Block off unused areas of your building(s).
- Designate 1-in-1-out protocol for tight spaces.
- Establish frequency and processes for enhanced cleaning and disinfecting — between services at minimum.
- Develop admission criteria for worship services, noting that anyone who is ill or appears ill should plan to worship remotely.
- Postpone children’s activities such as nursery/child care or implement additional safeguards.
- Discontinue playground use or implement additional safeguards and limitations.
- Postpone mission trips and summer activities such as vacation bible school (VBS).

CRITICAL NUMBERS

- Six feet of distance = 50 square feet per person when removing overlap.
- The virus may live on surfaces up to seven days.
- Disinfectants may need 2-10 minutes of contact to be effective (see EPA list).
- Symptoms typically show within 7-14 days.

BUILDING

- Conduct a thorough facility inspection/walk-through to check on the safety of your building before it is reopened.
- Restart systems and reset thermostats and lights.
- Flush hot and cold water through all points of use in your building if unoccupied for a prolonged period.
- Complete spring HVAC (professional) maintenance.
- Address overgrowth and other issues stemming from building vacancy.
- Check for any rodent/pest activity or infestations.
- Address any slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the building and contents before reopening.
- Ensure cleaning supplies and disinfectant have been ordered and are on hand.
- Make hand sanitizer and/or hand wipes available throughout the building.
- Post signs regarding social distancing, safety measures and handwashing.

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Preparation

SUPPLIES
- Disinfecting agents for your facility.
- Hand sanitizer for staff, volunteers and attendees.
- Masks and gloves for staff and volunteers.
- Face coverings for attendees.

COMMUNICATION
Prior to reopening, communicate your plan via multiple channels such as email, website, newspaper, social media, phone calls, etc.
- Communicate the plan and make it available to members and non-members alike.
- Update and share details of the plan as circumstances change.
- Reinforce messaging 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 generate awareness of new protocols and procedures.
- 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 protocols for worship services and gatherings.
- Addressing high(er) risk individuals that arrive or those presenting signs of illness.
- Maintaining physical distance requirements among those who attend.
- Understanding cleaning and disinfecting procedures, as well as the supplies used.

Implementation

BEFORE 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.
- Seat individuals or family units from front to back if building entrance is located rear of the worship area.
- Modify “passing the peace” or greeting time to avoid physical contact.

AFTER SERVICES
- Dismiss attendees from closest to furthest from the exit.
- Disinfect your worship area, materials, rooms used and frequently touched items such as doors, light switches, chairs, etc.
- Provide hand sanitizer and new protective equipment (masks and gloves) to those that have post-service responsibilities such as counting offerings, etc.

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 co-workers regarding established protocols.
- Maintain physical distance and wear face coverings to protect each other.
- Consider having office spaces deep cleaned on a weekly basis.
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/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2

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://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)

Post-Coronavirus Facility Re-Opening Checklist (Smart Church Solutions)
https://try.espace.co/post-coronavirus-facility-reopening-checklist/

Hartford Steam Boiler Equipment Checklists and Logs

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

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