



Religious and Faith-based Organizations Overview

According to [a statement from Governor Wolf](#), the stay-at-home policy should not affect the logistical operation of religious institutions.

- However, during the “Red” phase of [Pennsylvania’s Phased Reopening Plan](#), religious leaders are encouraged to find alternatives to in-person gatherings to avoid endangering their congregants. Individuals should not gather in religious buildings or homes for services or celebrations until the stay-at-home order is lifted.
- When the stay-at-home order is lifted in the “Yellow” phase, gatherings of more than 25 people are prohibited, but in-person gatherings are still not recommended.
- [In the “Green” phase](#), institutions may hold gatherings but are strongly encouraged to enforce social distancing and other mitigation measures such as masking.

Religious organizations play a vital role in maintaining community morale and cohesion, especially if large gatherings and other community assemblies are cancelled. People will need to be able to receive timely, reliable information from their religious and community leaders.

These materials and any related updates are provided and intended for general public informational purposes and guidance. While intended to be timely and accurate, please note that federal and state regulations and directives are changing often. To that extent, please continue to monitor this site for any significant modifications and developments.

The following [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) guidelines](#) for faith-based organizations should help religious institutions practice safe operation.

Employer Tips and Guidelines

- Review, update, and implement emergency operations and communications plans in collaboration with local health department and other relevant partners. The Chester County Health Department can be reached at 610-344-6225.
- Assign key leadership staff with the authority to develop, maintain, and act upon the emergency plan.
- Assign a point of contact to maximize communication between your organization and your state and local public health systems.
- Update the emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information.
- Identify everyone in your chain of communication (e.g., staff, volunteers, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information.
- Identify multiple methods, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, a website, email, and/or mail to help disseminate information to those inside and outside your organization.

Having back-up methods is important in case services are interrupted, such as when internet access is down.

- Designate an experienced person or persons who can take calls. Ask persons who might normally respond to calls for your organization to volunteer during an emergency, to facilitate the best use of their skills and experience.
- Develop information-sharing systems with partners, including local health officials.
- Identify services and activities (e.g. religious worship services, meetings, and classes) that might need to be limited or temporarily discontinued during an outbreak. Find alternative solutions that will ensure continuity for the people you serve, especially vulnerable populations such as older adults, persons with underlying health conditions, and persons with disabilities.
- Consistently monitor employee wellness and do not let anyone symptomatic report to work. Revisit your leave or sick program to allow for this time off.
- Employees who monitor their temperature at home should update their supervisor if they have a temperature exceeding 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and stay home.
- Set up policies for flexible work hours, working from home, and non-penalized staff leave for personal illness or care for sick household members or children in the event of school dismissals.
- Religious leaders should decide whether to modify specific religious rites, rituals, and services, consulting with local health officials as needed.
- Consider nodding, bowing, or waving instead of shaking hands, hugging, or kissing. Avoid holding hands during service/prayers. Modify the method for collecting regular financial contributions rather than passing a collection tray.
- If taking Communion: place the Communion elements in the recipient's hand, not on their tongue, and avoiding use of a common cup.
- Ensure handwashing strategies include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support healthy hygiene practices.
- Routinely (at least once per day, if possible) clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched.
- Limit the number of people who must gather at the workplace at one time. Work from home if possible.
- Minimize face-to-face interactions with people with symptoms. Use physical barriers to protect staff who interact with the people you serve. Consider installing a sneeze guard at the check-in desk or placing a table between staff and others.
- Increase the space between staff members' desks. If in the same room, seat staff to face in the same direction rather than facing each other.
- Be sure to regularly review the latest recommendations about religious gatherings from the CDC and state and local authorities.
- Consider cancelling gatherings that might put persons in close proximity to each other as well as which gatherings would include persons traveling.
- Encourage high-risk populations not to attend and offer alternative ways for them to participate. Consider small gatherings with inclusion of additional participants via phone or online (live or recorded) options.

- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information. Messaging should be culturally appropriate for your audience, easy to understand, and presented in the context of shared values and honored traditions.
- Implement strategies to continue any essential services. Ensure availability of meal programs and other assistance for the people you serve, including transportation services.
- Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bags or delivery; avoid distribution of items when people might gather in a group or crowd.
- Provide phone and online (live or recorded) meeting and service options when possible.
- Address the potential lack of access to computers/Internet among people you serve.
- Mailed newsletters, prerecorded messages from trusted leaders on a designated call-in telephone number, and printed copies of daily teaching guides may be options. For religious services, give people the option to watch online (live or recorded), if possible.
- Communicate that it is acceptable not to attend religious services in person and use technology at this time. This also may involve permission or guidance about the use of electronic devices at times when that practice is usually not permitted, such as Jewish Sabbath.
- Think creatively about all opportunities to increase the physical space between individuals and limit interactions in large group settings.
- Modify all gatherings to incorporate social distancing measures.
- Religious leaders should discuss with members the potential postponement of large events, such as celebrations (e.g., weddings, bar or bat mitzvahs, and baptisms), funerals, and holiday gatherings, or limiting to a small number of family and friends, ensuring protection of vulnerable populations, hand hygiene, and social distancing.
- If high risk populations attend any type of gathering in person, try to limit total attendance to 10 people.
- Holding any events in a large, well-ventilated area, maintaining about 6-foot distance between individuals by having members sit in alternating rows or otherwise spread out.
- Limit access to the facility by non-essential visitors or volunteers.
- If the facility is open, and transmission in the community increases, determine which other mitigation strategies need to be scaled up and/or extended. Consider extended closure of the facility or limited access for non-essential services.
- Consistently monitor employee wellness and do not let anyone symptomatic report to work. Revisit your leave or sick program to allow for this time off.
- Employees who monitor their temperature at home should update their supervisor if they have a temperature exceeding 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and stay home.

How Employees Can Protect Themselves

- If you feel unwell or have any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19, stay home. Note: Employer HR Policies, HIPPA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.
- Self-monitor temperature every morning. Employees who have a temperature exceeding 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit should stay home and notify their supervisor.
- Wear a face covering at all times.

- Maintain good hygiene practice: washing hands with soap and water or utilizing a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Meetings should not be in person if feasible; use video, chats, or other conference line-type systems instead.
- Practice social distancing of at least 6 feet as much as possible.
- The number of people in a space should be restricted when feasible so that everyone can stay at least 6 feet apart from one another.
- Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other symptoms of COVID-19 in others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands after.

If an Employee/Congregation Member Tests Positive

- If the individual receives a positive test notification while at work, follow established Human Resources policy. If the individual receives a positive test notification while NOT at work, the individual should follow established Human Resources policy, stay home and self-isolate in accordance with Chester County Health Department guidance.
- Close off areas visited by the positive individual. Refer to the [CDC's general cleaning & disinfecting guidance](#) and [guidance in facilities where someone is sick](#).
- Determine who had contact with the positive individual during the time the individual had symptoms as well as 48 hours prior to symptoms. Notify employees who were in close contact with the confirmed individual while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
 - People who had close contact must self-quarantine for 14 days from the date of last contact with the positive individual.
 - "Close contact" is defined as having contact for more than 15 minutes, at a distance of 6 feet or less, with a positive individual.
- Individuals may discontinue home isolation and return to work under the following conditions:
 - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since your fever went away without the use of fever-reducing medication
 - AND improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath)
 - AND At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- After returning to work, individuals should:
 - Wear a facemask at all times while at work until all symptoms are completely resolved or until 14 days after illness onset, whichever is longer.
 - Be restricted from contact with individuals at a higher risk (e.g., older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness).
 - Adhere to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette (e.g., cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, dispose of tissues in waste receptacles).
 - Self-monitor for symptoms. Seek immediate re-evaluation from occupational health/primary care provider and do not work if symptoms recur or worsen.

- The Chester County Health Department will be notified of all confirmed cases through established disease reporting protocols and will follow-up with the individual appropriately. Contact the Chester County Health Department at 610-344-6225.

Supporting Community Members

- Self-monitor your temperature every morning. Employees who have a temperature exceeding 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit should stay home and notify their supervisor.
- Wear a protective face covering at all times.
- Get to know which people you serve who might need extra assistance due to social isolation and economic hardships.
- Consider the needs of those who have disabilities, especially those who live alone. Remember to account for employees and volunteer staff who may be unavailable because they need to stay home to care for disabled family or household members.
- Encourage people, especially those at higher risk of severe illness, who live alone to seek out a “buddy” who will check on and help care for them if they get sick.
- Consider focusing your organization’s efforts to provide services that are most needed during the emergency, such as mental health, spiritual health, or social services.
- Clergy and volunteers may be asked to provide support to community members who will be under increased stress.
- Identify mental health or counseling resources. Trusted community leaders can work to decrease the stigma associated with using mental health resources and assure that materials are culturally and ethnically sensitive and are available in a variety of languages.