



# New England Conference

The United Methodist Church

## Guidelines for In-Person Worship & Ministry during **COVID-19**

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UPDATED: May 19, 2020

# Rethink Return Relaunch

We give thanks to God every day for the caring, courageous, adaptive ministry of the People Called Methodist around New England over these months of illness and isolation.

We celebrate the way the church continues to live and breathe ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

We grieve with many who have lost so much; and, we give thanks for the many ways we have been able to prevent further suffering and minister to those who are enduring significant hardship.

We are in this together ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

We acknowledge the following:

**We recognize** that our Annual Conference spans states under the administration of six different governors. We understand that each governor will make recommendations based on each state's context with regards to COVID-19. Some of these recommendations may be different from the Conference's commitment.

# We are connected through Christ

**We recognize** that the number of COVID-19 cases vary greatly from county to county across the Annual Conference. Some of us live in counties that have fewer than five cases, while others have thousands. Our personal and corporate experience of the need for physical distancing may vary greatly in the coming weeks.

**We recognize** that our ecumenical partners, independent churches, and faith communities may make decisions different from ours. Some in our local communities may begin to reopen their doors more quickly or more slowly than we do.

**We recognize** that when we do begin to return to our churches and camps and places of worship, it will not be the same as it was before COVID-19. Our return will not be the great gathering of all of the people many of us have dreamed of and hoped for. Returning to offices and church buildings will be gradual, in phases, and not advisable for those in highest risk groups for some time.

**And, we recognize** that we may have to take steps back if the virus resurges in the future.



# Current State

**Present — June 1**

**New England Conference churches are not holding in-person worship, meetings or gatherings.**

Churches are providing worship opportunities via an assortment of platforms including online or televised worship, conference calls, DVD worship, etc. Pastors, staff and key volunteers are creating these worship experiences while maintaining current guidelines of physical distancing and meeting in groups of less than ten people.

Discontinuing in-person worship, meetings and gatherings has helped us love our neighbor well by keeping everyone safe.

**These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.**

# Current State: What Should We Be Doing Right Now?

Present — June 1

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>In-Person Worship</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No in-person worship through May 31. Churches should hold virtual worship services only. Worship teams should record from home, not the church buildings.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Preschools, Children &amp; Youth</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Generally most of our preschools, childcare, children and youth ministries follow the public school guidance which is closed through the end of this school year. The <a href="#">CDC has strict guidelines</a> for limited reopening of preschools and childcare to assist with children of essential workers. It is difficult for children and youth to practice physical distancing. If you plan to reopen any preschool, childcare or children/youth activities prior to public schools reopening, we ask you to be in touch with your District Superintendent.</li><li>Consider creative online VBS and youth activity options to keep children and youth engaged, making sure to honor the On-Line Safety section of the <a href="#">Safe Sanctuaries internet safety</a>.</li></ul> |
| <b>Missions &amp; Outreach</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No mission trips including youth trips are recommended (this applies through the summer at least).</li><li>All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Church Staff</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Work remotely;</li><li>Minimal drop-in staffing for essential operations only (collecting mail, processing payments, etc.) using the guidelines for size of gatherings, physical distancing, wearing masks, gloves, etc. Their presence onsite should be done with minimal overlap.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Groups</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Meetings, Bible studies, etc. should be held remotely.</li></ul>   |

**Recommendations around each of these areas will be regularly updated and revised. If you have additional questions about a specific area of ministry, please consult your District Superintendent.**

A black and white photograph of a person reading a Bible. The person's hands are visible, holding the open book. The background is blurred, showing other people in a church setting.

# Preparation Phase

## Before in-person worship begins

Returning to in-person worship will require a **phased-in approach**. To promote the safest practices, it is recommended that **CDC Guidelines, local and state guidelines** and **denominational guidelines** all be considered when making decisions about when to launch phases.

### PHASE GOALS:

- **Create confidence** for the staff as plans are made for the congregation and community to return to our building/s.
- **Identify challenges** that would hinder bringing people back to our building/s safely.
- **Get comfortable** with the “new normal.”

# Preparation Phase: Staff, Volunteers & Space

## *Before in-person worship begins*

When state and local guidelines determine it is safe for church employees to return to their facilities as part of their normal work schedule, it is important that this opportunity be leveraged to ensure that local church guidelines are established, documented, and most importantly, rigorously followed. **These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.**

### **CHECKLIST: Preparing Staff & Volunteers**

#### Preparing Staff/Volunteers

- Ensure facility has adequate amounts of masks and gloves for staff and volunteers (particularly greeters & cleaners).
- Plan an online session to review hygiene, cleaning/disinfecting practices that will be expected upon return.
- Develop plans for changing worship logistics to ensure safety of attendees (e.g. offering, communion). *More ideas in the next section.*
- Develop protocol for ushers & greeters that would allow for physical distancing. You may consider new roles for volunteers in high-risk categories. *More ideas in the next section.*
- Create a trial phase to document and practice communications, processes & procedures that will ensure safety when in-person worship is initiated, learning what is and is not effective.
- Publish your local guidelines for anyone on church property. Monitor understanding and adherence to guidelines among staff. Identify any needed guideline or process remediation.
- At the time you consider reopening a preschool, contact your District Superintendent regarding compliance with all guidelines.

# Preparation Phase: Staff, Volunteers & Space

*Before in-person worship begins*

## CHECKLIST: Preparing Your Space

[Click here to view the CDC's Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting for more information on how to properly sanitize your facility.](#)

### Preparing Your Space

- Ensure 3-month supply of cleaning/sanitizing products. Have a system in place to reorder items before they are depleted.
- Eliminate places to congregate (e.g. store chairs; eliminate coffee stations.)
- Thoroughly sanitize all surfaces, especially those in high-traffic areas.  
After each event, disinfect all surfaces after each use.  
**NOTE:** If it has been more than 7 days since a person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 has visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. This guidance also applies when reopening a building that has been closed to everyone for a full week or longer.
- Develop congregational seating plan for physical distancing. Ensure at least a 6-ft distance.
- Develop protocol for sanitizing to take place before and after service and in real-time during worship.
- Walk through each step of in-person worship multiple times. Follow signage, communications & directions that will be provided to worshipers. Refine as needed.



# Looking Ahead

## June and beyond

Worship is an essential service for our members. The safety of our communities should not be compromised. Guidelines provided by state and local governments are a baseline and recommendations for worship may be more restrictive in the interest of safety. Church officials must be aware of the local situation and should tailor their path through the phases of these guidelines to ensure that they are appropriate to the local situation. **When in doubt, emphasize safety over expedience.**

When first returning to in-person worship, continue to consider yourself an online congregation as not all members will choose to be in our building/s at first or at all. Consider a “soft opening” relaunch with limited-capacity, in-person meetings that do not exceed the maximum number of individuals recommended by state and local governments. Continue to engage online worshipers even after going to an in-person worship experience.



# Re-Entry Decision Tree

1. Has our Re-Entry Team created a plan for safely conducting in-person gatherings that includes our unique values and context (e.g., the cultural, social and emotional aspects of the congregation)?\*



If no, continue gathering virtually and complete your discernment process before proceeding.

2. Is a significant percentage of our congregation able or willing to meet in person in Phase 2?



If no, continue gathering virtually until the objective is met.

3. Do we have a sustainable amount of all supplies (masks, hand sanitizer, etc.) needed to safely gather in-person?



If no, continue gathering virtually until the objective is met.

4. Have all our teams received adequate training to implement the plan well?



If no, continue gathering virtually until the objective is met.

5. Does our local (county government) allow us to gather?



If no, continue gathering virtually until the objective is met.

**Re-enter your building for in-person gatherings while adhering to all local government restrictions**

\* Congregational values, such as hospitality and concern for vulnerable church members, may lead the congregation to continue to delay re-entering the building for on-site worship, even if it is technically safe to do so using this decision tree. The discernment of congregational leaders, using holy conferencing, should be communicated clearly so that church members can understand the why, what, and how of essential ministries as their church continues to make disciples and transform the world, all to the glory of God.

# Looking Ahead: Initial Return to In-Person Worship

## June and beyond

If in reviewing these guidelines, the church determines they cannot meet them for Sunday worship, it is recommended that the church shall continue worshipping remotely and review other in-person ministries for the ability to meet the guidelines. **These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.**

### **CHECKLIST:** The church is ready to return to a version of in-person worship when:

- Church & staff are in compliance with state/local orders regarding distancing, gathering & sanitation (including the ability to sanitize common areas before, during, and after worship).
- The church is properly staffed with the trained volunteers/lay people necessary to regulate and enforce state/local orders regarding distancing, gathering & sanitation (incl. seating, mask wearing, bathroom occupancy, opening/closing doors, parking).  
The church can provide reasonable accommodation to allow for comfortable worship while still complying to physical
- distancing requirements (for example: clearly marked areas, large spaces for families, special seating for high risk individuals, etc.)
- The church has a clear, proactive communication strategy to ensure congregants are aware of current practices and safety/wellness protocols (e.g email, website, social media, signage at the church).
- The church has a dedicated team which reviews the church's compliance to state/local protocols and agrees upon any necessary exceptions.

### **Who Should Attend In-Person Worship Services?**

Congregants meeting the following criteria are recommended to attend in-person worship:

- People who are well (no recent contact with infected persons, not exhibiting flu-like symptoms)
- Clergy, worship team (technical and performing), ushers/lay leaders\*
- People who cannot attend online
- People who feel it is the right time for their family

\*if well and not in a high-risk group

# Looking Ahead: Ideas for Safe In-Person Worship

## June and beyond

All churches should limit the number of participants (including worship leaders) according to state/local guidelines. The following are not to be seen as requirements, but rather ideas to help churches manage worship logistics in their phased relaunch of in-person worship.

**NOTE: Consider continuing remote-only church until guidelines can be relaxed to where a comfortable, safe worship environment is achievable. These guidelines will be reviewed and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.**

|                            | Recommendations  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Attendance Register</b> | <p><b>Goal: Prevent sharing germs via physical items passed from person to person.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No physical attendance pads passed.</li> <li>• Create online attendance register.</li> <li>• Have usher/greeter fill out attendance register as people enter through verbal conversation.</li> <li>• Have individual cards available as people enter for those who do not want to fill out online register.</li> </ul> <p><b>You will need a method to record attendees' contact info to facilitate required contact tracing.</b></p>                      |
| <b>A/V Equipment</b>       | <p><b>Goal: Prevent germ sharing and spreading germs that stay on surfaces</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanitize before and after each service.</li> <li>• No sharing of hearing enhancement equipment.</li> <li>• Identify microphones to be used by single individuals, no shared microphones, music stands, etc.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Baptism/ Ceremonies</b> | <p><b>Goal: Honor traditions while keeping everyone safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how your church will address special events: baptisms, weddings, funerals, Vacation Bible School: What events should be cancelled and what other events can be postponed or "retooled" in a different format (Consider livestreaming or recording if possible to share with congregation)?</li> <li>• Follow state/local guidelines for attendance numbers and other considerations.</li> <li>• Limit baptisms to one person per bowl of water in the sanctuary.</li> </ul> |

# Looking Ahead: Ideas for Safe In-Person Worship

## June and beyond

|                                  | Recommendations   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Communion</b>                 | <p><b>Goal: Prevent spread of germs through food, passed elements, etc.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Utilize individual pre-packaged elements handed out as people enter or placed on seats in advance.</li><li>• Utilize individual, disposable cups passed out by individual who has sanitized hands, is wearing gloves.</li><li>• Offer a blessing/prayer for those who do not choose to receive communion during this time.</li><li>• Have trash receptacles nearby.</li></ul>                       |
| <b>Entry &amp; Exit</b>          | <p><b>Goal: Control pathways, prevent traffic jams, ensure everyone entering worship space has used precautions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prop doors open to avoid touching doorknobs or have one person hold door open (wearing a mask).</li><li>• Single entry point, clearly marked exits with hand sanitizer at each.</li><li>• Guide family groups to exit the worship area/building 10 feet apart and encourage them not to linger</li><li>• Walk-through video to show path/process.</li></ul> |
| <b>Food &amp; Beverage</b>       | <p><b>Goal: Prevent germ sharing and germs that stay on surfaces for longer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discontinue all food and beverage in building/s until further notice.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Interpersonal Interaction</b> | <p><b>Goal: Prevent airborne droplets of potential germs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shorten services to allow for more time to enter/exit the premises.</li><li>• Be aware of physical distancing.</li><li>• Discontinue any hand holding, passing of the peace, hand shaking, etc. Instead, encourage another way to greet each other at a distance (smile and wave or <a href="#">Click here for ideas</a>).</li></ul>   |
| <b>Masks</b>                     | <p><b>Goal: Prevent airborne droplets of potential germs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All participants over age 2 required to wear masks (have a supply available for persons who arrive without).</li><li>• Consider whether children will understand and comply with requirements before inviting them into worship.</li><li>• Speakers/preachers may remove masks while speaking/singing <b>IF</b> they are a minimum of 16 feet from the nearest person.</li></ul>                                   |

# Looking Ahead: Ideas for Safe In-Person Worship

June and beyond

## Recommendations

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Offering</b>           | <p><b>Goal: Prevent sharing germs via physical items passed from person to person</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discontinue use of offering plates, baskets, etc., passed in pews.</li><li>• Encourage online giving.</li><li>• Use centrally-located (at entries or exits, along designated single-direction pathway) collection units.</li><li>• Counters should wear masks and gloves and practice physical distancing during the count.</li><li>• Offer prayer that specifically mentions online offering to honor &amp; encourage online giving.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Outdoors</b>           | <p><b>Goal: Prevent passing of germs and observe physical distancing rules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep in mind best practices for physical distancing in outdoor spaces too: including wearing masks and maintaining 6 feet of distance. This applies to drive-in worship where windows may be down and cars are parked close together.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Pew Paraphernalia</b>  | <p><b>Goal: Prevent germ sharing and germs that stay on surfaces for longer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove all individual items in pews (Bibles, hymnals, pens/pencils, offering envelopes, attendance registers, crayons/toys, prayer cards, removeable seat cushions).</li><li>• Use projection for liturgy, announcements.</li><li>• Utilize single-use bulletins with song lyrics, etc., that are handed out by individuals who have sanitized/ wearing gloves and disposed of as people leave service.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Reservation System</b> | <p><b>Goal: Ensure rules of physical distancing can be followed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not fill to occupancy (or reduced occupancy as state requires) through reservations alone; leave space for guests or unplanned attendees who may not have a reservation.</li><li>• Reserved seats should be filled in a timely manner (e.g. 5 minutes after the service begins), otherwise they will be released to walk-ins.</li><li>• Reservation systems must be reliable, easy to use, and accessible.</li><li>• You will need a way to control the number of participants, but please remember our shared values of hospitality and welcome. Consider having more than one service or divide the alphabet to assign dates/times for worship.</li></ul> |
| <b>Seating</b>            | <p><b>Goal: Prevent passing of germs and observe physical distancing rules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage physical distancing measures from family to family (at least 6-foot space between each family).</li><li>• Consider assigned seating.</li><li>• Consider dismissing from worship by family, row, or section of the congregation.</li><li>• Restrict seating closest to platform.</li><li>• Upholstered seating cannot be properly cleaned between use, so alternative seating will be needed. Consider using metal, plastic or wooden chairs in a fellowship hall for worship instead.</li></ul>   |

# Looking Ahead: Ideas for Safe In-Person Worship

## June and beyond

|                               | Recommendations  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Singing/Spoken Liturgy</b> | <p><b>Goal: Ensure rules of physical distancing can be followed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Group singing is dangerous indoors; there should be no in-person singing.</li><li>• Consider playing recorded choral music that you've prepared for online worship.</li><li>• Utilize alternative recorded and live instrumental music (no live brass or wind instruments).</li><li>• Teach American Sign Language to sing hymns in a new way.</li><li>• Suspend all choir practice.</li><li>• Raised voices/shouting can be as dangerous as coughing in terms of spreading the virus.</li><li>• See <a href="#">guidelines regarding music</a> on our Re-entry page</li></ul> |
| <b>Vestments</b>              | <p><b>Goal: Prevent germ sharing and germs that stay on surfaces for longer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discontinue use of shared vestments - choir robes, acolyte robes, etc.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Volunteer Roles</b>        | <p><b>Goal: Show volunteers they are valued while you are keeping them safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allow for new roles to be created for ushers who may be in higher-risk category.</li><li>• Take time to re-vision what roles that previously were centralized around physical elements/interaction - can you give people a different purpose in their roles and not just leave them behind?</li><li>• There will be a need for a sanitation team to keep things clean.</li><li>• Consider temperature checks for all staff and volunteers.</li></ul>   |



# Phases

## June and beyond

We know that the language and criteria for each “phase” of re-entry may differ slightly by region, state, municipality. Your state will offer guidance on what phase you are in and what is allowed or restricted in your area. Please adjust the following guidelines accordingly.

You can always speak with your District Superintendent about your specific context. We will also create opportunities for church leaders to share ideas and best practices with each other as we move into these new phases.

When first returning to in-person worship, continue to consider yourself an online congregation as not all members will choose to be in our building/s at first or at all.

It is also important to remember that this is not likely to be a linear progression through the phases nor will this be a one-time process. We may move back and forth between phases many times.

# Phase One: What Should We Be Doing?

## Gatherings of 10 people or fewer are allowed

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>In-Person Worship</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High risk individuals (people over 65 and those with underlying conditions), including staff and volunteers, should continue to stay at home.</li><li>• Limit gatherings to those that can be held virtually (by remote viewing) for vulnerable populations and consider video streaming outdoors, or drive-in options for services.</li><li>• Consider recording in the sanctuary if necessary, while maintaining at least 6 ft of space between people (greater distance for those who are singing), unless staff/volunteers are at-risk</li><li>• Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting</li></ul>   |
| <b>Preschools, Children &amp; Youth</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally most of our preschools, childcare, children and youth ministries follow the public school guidance which is closed through the end of this school year. The <a href="#">CDC has strict guidelines</a> for limited reopening of preschools and childcare to assist with children of essential workers. It is difficult for children and youth to practice physical distancing. If you plan to reopen any preschool, childcare or children/youth activities prior to public schools reopening, we ask you to be in touch with your District Superintendent.</li><li>• Consider creative online VBS and youth activity options to keep children and youth engaged, making sure to honor the On-Line Safety section of the <a href="#">Safe Sanctuaries internet safety</a>.</li></ul> |
| <b>Missions &amp; Outreach</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No mission trips including youth trips are recommended through the summer.</li><li>• Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals prohibited</li><li>• All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Groups</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Church groups:</b> Continue to meet remotely</li><li>• <b>Other building users:</b> Consider allowing building users back in if they are able to observe all restrictions and protocols above.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Church Staff</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to telework where possible.</li><li>• Continue to clean and sanitize often.</li><li>• Require masks if more than one person is in the office at same time.</li><li>• Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.</li></ul>   |

### A note about these phases

The information presented here is based on allowed gathering sizes. State definitions of phases will vary. Your state will offer guidance on what phase you are in and what is allowed or restricted in your area. You should follow your state's directives, and if you have additional questions about a specific area of ministry or how to use these guidelines in your specific context, please consult your District Superintendent.



# Phase Two: What Should We Be Doing?

## Gatherings of 50 people or fewer are allowed

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>In-Person Worship</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue holding remote worship so that those who are restricted from coming because of high-risk or fear will not be excluded. No groups larger than 50 at a time (The number is not as important as the distancing; we recommend using only 25% of your worship space.).</li><li>• Be sure you have a plan for limiting the number of attendees and how to handle overflow.</li><li>• Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting</li><li>• <b>Churches with fewer than 50 in worship</b> might consider in-person options <b>ONLY</b> if your space allows for family units to sit 6 feet apart and you are able to clean and ensure safety for all.</li></ul> |
| <b>Preschools, Children &amp; Youth</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is still too early for Vacation Bible School, mission trips, and other programs of this nature.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Missions &amp; Outreach</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No mission trips including youth trips are recommended through the summer.</li><li>• All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.</li><li>• Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals prohibited</li></ul>  |
| <b>Groups</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Church groups:</b> Continue to meet remotely</li><li>• <b>Other building users:</b> Consider allowing building users back in if they are able to observe all above restrictions and protocols above.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Church Staff</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to telework where possible.</li><li>• Continue to clean and sanitize often.</li><li>• Require masks if more than one person is in the office at same time.</li><li>• Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.</li></ul>  |

### A note about these phases

The information presented here is based on allowed gathering sizes. State definitions of phases will vary. Your state will offer guidance on what phase you are in and what is allowed or restricted in your area. You should follow your state's directives, and if you have additional questions about a specific area of ministry or how to use these guidelines in your specific context, please consult your District Superintendent.

# Phase Three: What Should We Be Doing?

## Gatherings of 50 people or more are allowed

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>In-Person Worship</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue holding remote worship so that those who are restricted from coming because of high-risk or fear will not be excluded.</li><li>• Continue to observe physical distancing within the worship space ONLY if your space allows for family units to sit 6 feet apart and you are able to clean and ensure safety for all.</li><li>• Be sure you have a plan for limiting the number of attendees and how to handle overflow.</li><li>• Consider outdoor options</li><li>• Follow all CDC guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting</li></ul> |
| <b>Preschools, Children &amp; Youth</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is still too early for Vacation Bible School, mission trips, and other programs of this nature; wait until schools reopen</li></ul>   |
| <b>Missions &amp; Outreach</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No mission trips including youth trips are recommended through the summer.</li><li>• All outreach to vulnerable populations (homeless, etc.) should be done with appropriate physical distance and sanitation practices, including no sit-down meals until public gatherings are safe.</li><li>• Visits to senior living facilities, homes, and hospitals prohibited</li></ul>   |
| <b>Groups</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Church groups:</b></li><li>• continue to meet remotely for vulnerable population;</li><li>• some meetings and small groups of fewer than 10 may meet if they wear masks and observe physical distancing;</li><li>• no food/beverage;</li><li>• limit to under 1 hour;</li><li>• no singing</li><li>• <b>Other building users:</b> May resume operations according to all the restrictions for phase 2-3, with a plan to address cleaning needs and agreement to observe all protocols</li></ul>   |
| <b>Church Staff</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to telework where possible.</li><li>• Continue to clean and sanitize often.</li><li>• Require masks if more than one person is in the office at same time.</li><li>• Allow high-risk/vulnerable employees and volunteers to work from home.</li></ul>   |

### A note about these phases

The information presented here is based on allowed gathering sizes. State definitions of phases will vary. Your state will offer guidance on what phase you are in and what is allowed or restricted in your area. You should follow your state's directives, and if you have additional questions about a specific area of ministry or how to use these guidelines in your specific context, please consult your District Superintendent.



# New England Conference

The United Methodist Church

## Safety Actions

An Addendum to our  
Guidelines for  
In-Person Worship & Ministry  
during **COVID-19**

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UPDATED: May 17, 2020



# Going deeper

## This document is a companion to our In-person worship guidelines

This information supplements the previous pages in this document that make up the *Guidelines for In-Person Worship & Ministry during COVID-19*.

We hope that you and your re-entry team will review these measures carefully and will adapt them to your context.

If you have specific questions about these, you can speak with your District Superintendent or use our online question/comment form to reach the Conference Re-Entry Team.

[Find our question form here.](#)

These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information. As we move through launch phases, new guidelines will be communicated.

# Safety Actions: Hygiene

## Promote healthy hygiene practices (Phases 1-3)

- Encourage everyone to use of a cloth face covering (mask) at all gatherings and whenever they are in the building. (Exception: children younger than 2 years old).
- Not using a cloth face covering may be appropriate at times for individuals who have trouble breathing or need assistance to remove their mask.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including:
  - soap
  - hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer)
  - tissues
  - no-touch trash cans
- Consider posting signs on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and promote everyday protective measures
  - Physical Distancing
  - Mask Wearing
  - Handwashing
  - Not sharing objects
  - Recognizing environmental hazards (for example, prop doors open to limit touching the doorknob)

**These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.**

# Safety Actions: Cleaning

## Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation (Phases 1-3)

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects between use.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep them away from children.
- Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaires' disease and other diseases associated with water.

**These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.**

# Safety Actions: Dealing with illness

## Plan for when a staff member or congregant becomes sick (Phases 1-3)

- Encourage staff or congregants who are sick to stay at home.
- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
- Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or other applicable laws in accordance with religious practices.
- Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use the area until it is after cleaning and disinfection; wait 24 hours to clean and disinfect to reduce risk to individuals cleaning.  
If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Advise sick staff and congregants not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.

## Closing (Phases 1-3)

- Inform those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the community, it is strongly suggested to close, then properly clean and disinfect the area and the building where the individual was present.

# Safety Actions: Operations

## Maintain healthy operations (Phases 1-3)

- Encourage staff who are sick to stay at home.
- Implement flexible sick leave and related flexible policies and practices for staff (e.g., allow work from home, if feasible).
- Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Monitor absenteeism and create a roster of trained back-up staff.
- Communicate clearly with staff (and congregants) about actions being taken to protect their health.

## Train all staff (Phases 1-3)

- Train all clergy and staff in all safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that social distancing is maintained.

**These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and revised based on updated information.**