



# Interim Guidance for Places of Worship and Religious Services (May 21, 2021)

**Guidelines for Places of Worship:** Any place where people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. All entities that congregate people in an enclosed space should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission. The guidance below will help places of worship reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

We strongly recommend all faith leaders encourage members of their congregations and faith community to become fully vaccinated and to learn from information at [Find Your Spot, Take Your Shot](#) where they can receive a vaccination. Learn more about actions for Faith Leaders to respond to COVID-19, including becoming a Vaccine Ambassador, at NCDHHS's [Faith Leaders Toolkit](#).

For more guidance on vaccinations, please refer to our [vaccine webpage](#). For more information on recommendations for people who have been fully vaccinated please refer to our [Interim Guidance for Individuals Who Have Been Vaccinated Against COVID-19](#).

It is recommended that all people who are not fully vaccinated, should continue to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing in public settings.

## **This guidance covers the following topics:**

- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
- Cloth Face Coverings
- Cleaning and Hygiene
- Monitoring for Symptoms
- Combatting Misinformation
- Water and Ventilation Systems
- Additional Resources

## **Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure**

[Social distancing](#) is a key tool to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. If you are not fully vaccinated (meaning 2 weeks after the last vaccine dose of a series), stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people; do not gather in groups; stay out of crowded or poorly ventilated indoor places and avoid mass gatherings.

Places of worship should encourage all people who are not fully vaccinated to maintain social distance from others who are not in their household

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Because it can be hard to know who is vaccinated and who is not, some faith leaders may decide to continue practicing social distancing actions below for their entire congregation until more people in North Carolina are vaccinated.

### It is recommended that places of worship:

- Consider holding worship services outdoors or virtually, if possible.
- Space seating arrangements so there are 6 feet between groups who live in the same household. Consider limiting seating to alternate rows.
- Only allow singing or choir when outdoors, as risk of viral spread is increased by increased respiratory effort.
  - In the event singing does occur, ensure members of a choir or music ensemble maintain a distance of at least 6 feet or greater from each other, particularly indoors, when the group includes persons that are unvaccinated, or with unknown vaccine status.
- Encourage avoidance of physical contact among attendees as permissible within the community's faith tradition, including hugging, kissing, shaking hands, etc.
- In indoor and outdoor areas where people gather, provide floor markings at six-foot intervals to encourage social distancing
- Clearly mark designated entry and exit points; if a house of worship or building has only one entry/exit point, stagger entry and exit times if possible.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk.

### Cloth Face Coverings

- It is strongly recommended that all staff and congregants (regardless of vaccine status) wear a face covering and practice social distancing in large crowded indoor spaces or indoor setting with a large number of children present.
- It is strongly recommended that all staff and congregants, who are not fully vaccinated, wear a cloth face covering in all public settings and outdoors when it is difficult to maintain 6ft of social distancing.
- It is encouraged that places of worship provide cloth face coverings for staff and congregants. If provided, they must be single use or properly laundered using hot water and a high heat dryer between uses.
- Please share guidance to employees on use, wearing, and removal of cloth face coverings, such as [CDC's guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks](#) and [CDC's use of cloth face coverings](#).

### Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with 60% or more alcohol content reduces the spread of transmission.

### It is recommended that places of worship:

- Clean surfaces once a day, prioritizing high-touch surfaces. If there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean and disinfect the space using an [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#) (the virus that causes COVID-19).

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- Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers and assure soap and hand drying materials are available at sinks.
- Prominently provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) at entrances and exits and near high-touch areas.
- Promote frequent use of hand washing and hand sanitizer for staff and attendees. Require handwashing of staff immediately upon reporting to work, after contact with individuals, after performing cleaning and disinfecting activities, and frequently throughout the day.

### Monitoring for Symptoms

Staff, volunteers, congregants, and visitors should be encouraged to self-monitor for symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath or recent loss of smell or taste.

If staff or volunteers develop symptoms, they should notify their supervisor and return home. Congregants or visitors with symptoms should be instructed to return home as well. More information on [how to monitor for symptoms](#) is available from the CDC.

#### It is recommended that places of worship:

- Have a plan in place for immediately separating visitors or congregants from others if symptoms develop.
- Have a plan in place for immediately removing employees or volunteers from work if symptoms develop.
- Employees or volunteers who have symptoms when they arrive at work or become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees, volunteers, congregants, and/or visitors and sent home with a recommendation to get a clinical assessment
- Post signage at the main entrance requesting that people who have been symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter, such as [Know Your Ws/Stop if You Have Symptoms](#) flyers (English - [Color, Black & White](#); Spanish - [Color, Black & White](#)).
- Establish and enforce sick leave policies to prevent the spread of disease, including:
  - Enforcing employees staying home if sick.
  - Encouraging liberal use of sick leave policy.
  - Expanding paid leave policies to allow employees to stay home when sick.
- [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an employee or volunteer has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms, the employee or volunteer should be excluded from work until:
  - No fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) AND
  - Other symptoms have improved (e.g., coughing, shortness of breath) AND
  - At least 10 days have passed since first symptoms

**Note: A test-based strategy is no longer recommended to discontinue isolation or precautions and employers should not require documentation of a negative test before allowing a worker to return.**

- [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an employee or volunteer has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they should remain out of work until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.
- Require symptomatic employees, volunteers, congregants, and visitors to wear masks until leaving the facility. Cleaning and disinfecting procedure should be implemented by designated personnel following [CDC guidelines](#) once sick employee leaves.

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- ❑ Provide employees volunteers, congregants, and visitors with information on help lines to access information or other support in reference to COVID-19, e.g. 211 and Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463).

### Places of Worship can consider:

- ❑ Conduct daily [symptom](#) screening (use this standard interview questionnaire ) ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)) of employees at entrance to workplace with immediately sending symptomatic workers home to [isolate](#).

## Combatting Misinformation

Help ensure that the information your employees, volunteers, congregants, and visitors are getting is coming directly from reliable resources. Use resources from a trusted source like the [CDC](#) or [NCDHHS](#) to promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### It is recommended that places of worship:

- ❑ Make information available to workers, volunteers, congregants, and visitors about COVID-19 prevention and mitigation strategies, using methods like videos, webinars, or printed materials like FAQs. Some reliable sources include [NC DHHS COVID-19](#), [Know Your Ws: Wear, Wait, Wash](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Latest Updates](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Materials & Resources](#)
- ❑ Put up signs and posters, such as those found [Know Your Ws: Wear, Wait, Wash](#) and those found [Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19](#).
- ❑ If appropriate, have messaging such as a short video emphasizing the importance of maintaining physical distancing and hand hygiene.

## Water and Ventilation Systems

Reduced use of water and ventilation systems can pose their own health hazards. There is increased risk for Legionella and other waterborne pathogens from stagnant or standing water.

### Before reopening, it is recommended that places of worship:

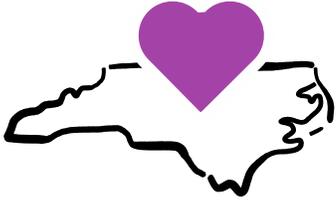
- ❑ Follow the CDC's [Guidance](#) for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation to minimize the risk of diseases associated with water.
- ❑ Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk to people using the facility.

## Additional Resources

- CDC: [FAQs for Administrators and Leaders at Community- and Faith-Based Organizations](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

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- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security: [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#)



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**Staying apart brings us together.  
Protect your family and neighbors.**

**Learn more at [nc.gov/covid19](https://nc.gov/covid19).**



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