

Recommended Guidance for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Faith-Based Facilities and Houses of Worship

I. **Background**

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that has emerged and caused coronavirus disease (abbreviated as COVID-19). Public health experts continue to learn about SARS-CoV-2, but based on current data and similar coronaviruses, spread from person-to-person happens most frequently among close contact (those within about six feet) via respiratory droplets. Transmission of SAR-CoV-2 to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been documented yet, but current evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of material. One primary measure discussed in this guidance will be cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection – a best practice for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in facilities.

II. **Purpose**

This guidance provides recommendations for Faith-Based facilities and houses of worship. As we prepare for the spread of the COVID-19 virus, there are some precautions faith-based leaders, staff, and their communities can take to improve health and safety. Early evidence suggests that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread more easily than the virus that causes seasonal influenza, and it appears that the COVID-19 disease is more deadly than seasonal influenza.

III. **Symptoms**

Clinical features are fever or signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illnesses. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Human coronaviruses can sometimes cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, such as pneumonia or bronchitis.

IV. **Transmission**

Human coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing and sneezing;
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands;

- touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands; and
- rarely, fecal contamination.

V. **Prevention**

The following can help prevent the spread of coronaviruses and protect yourself and your members from becoming infected:

- wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; and
- avoid close contact with people who are sick.

There are currently no vaccines to protect against human coronavirus infection.

VI. **Preventative Actions to eliminate the spread of COVID-19**

- The Governor has ordered¹ that all public and private gatherings of 10 people or more are prohibited for the duration of the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation. This includes faith-based events.
- Switch to and use disinfectant products that have been pre-approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use against emerging viral pathogens.
- Disinfectants should be applied during routine cleaning all facility spaces.
- Clothing and linens may become contaminated with the virus, so it is also important to add disinfectant when washing laundry.
- Public spaces need to be cleaned frequently. If possible, provide disposable disinfectant wipes to disinfect surfaces. High touch areas should also be cleaned with disinfectant.
- Consult with the local or county health department to determine appropriate actions if a person in your facility presents symptoms of COVID-19 disease, as well as how to respond if asked to quarantine. Public health officials at the state, federal, and local level have the legal authority to implement control measures to prevent the spread of communicable disease, such as isolation and quarantine, travel restrictions, and medical treatment.

VII. **Preventative Actions**

- Train staff and others to use the disinfectants safely and correctly. People should wear gloves when cleaning. Many of these cleaning products need to remain on hard surfaces for several minutes in order to work. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper use to get the most virus killing protection. Schedule and perform routine cleaning and disinfection of all contact surfaces in public areas, toilet flush handles, door handles, water faucet handles, seating, and flooring.

¹ Executive Order 2020-07 - <https://www2.illinois.gov/Documents/ExecOrders/2020/ExecutiveOrder-2020-07.pdf>

- Train staff and post signage to remind visitors and workers to frequently wash hands with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds each time. If possible, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol in all areas and to all staff. In addition, staff and visitors should be advised not to touch their faces and to practice "social distancing" by standing at least six feet away from visitors and other workers.
- Educate staff and visitors on the most common signs and symptoms of coronavirus infection, which are fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. Symptoms typically occur 1-14 days after exposure, though a small proportion of people who are infected don't have symptoms.

VIII. **Preventative Actions for the introduction of respiratory germs INTO your facility**

- Post signs at entrances instructing visitors not to enter if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.
- Assess visitors' symptoms of respiratory infection upon entering the facility.

IX. **Preventative Actions for the spread of respiratory germs WITHIN your facility²**

- Monitor visitors as they enter and monitor staff at least once prior to starting their shift for fever or respiratory symptoms.
- Restrict visitors and staff with fever or acute respiratory symptoms.
- Monitor local and state public health sources to understand COVID-19 activity in your community to help inform your evaluation of individuals with unknown respiratory illness. If there is transmission of COVID-19 in the community, in addition to implementing the precautions described above for visitors and staff with acute respiratory infection, facilities should also consult with public health authorities for additional guidance.
- Post signs throughout the facility describing ways to prevent the spread of germs.
- Avoid shaking hands as a social greeting.
- Support hand and respiratory hygiene as well as cough etiquette by visitors and staff.
- Ensure staff clean their hands according to CDC guidelines, including before and after contact with visitors, and after contact with contaminated surfaces or equipment.
- Put alcohol-based hand sanitizer in every rest room (ideally both inside and outside of the room) as well as any communal area.
- Make sure tissues are available and every sink is well-stocked with soap and hand drying materials for hand washing.
- Position a trash can near restroom exits to make it easy for people to discard tissues, paper towels, etc.
- Perform hand hygiene regularly.

X. **Preventative Actions for Vulnerable Populations**

Social distancing actions are taken to restrict when and where people can gather to stop or

² Source: Stop the Spread of Germs - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>

slow the spread of COVID-19 or other infectious diseases in communities. Social distancing actions include limiting large groups of people coming together, closing buildings, or canceling events. People with medical conditions may wish to avoid a congregate setting.

XI. **Contingency Planning**

- Consider reducing open hours or maximum capacity. Check the IDPH and CDC websites daily for updated guidance to reduce spread of COVID-19.
- Develop an emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information to staff and your community.
- Identify actions to take if you need to temporarily postpone or cancel activities, especially for groups at greater risk such as older adults or people with chronic health conditions. This could include electronic messages sent to community members prior to travel to the facility as well as messages requesting that people leave the facility if they exhibit symptoms.
- Identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the facility. If needed, contact emergency services for those who need emergency care. Public transportation, shared rides, and taxis should be avoided for sick persons.
- Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, social media, etc. to help disseminate information.

XII. **Resources**

- CDC Get Your Community and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>
- CDC What to do if you are sick - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html>
- CDC When and How to Wash Your Hands - <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- CDC People At-risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html#stay-home>
- CDC Print Resources - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>