

STANISLAUS COUNTY COVID-19 SAFE WORSHIP GUIDANCE

PLANNING DOCUMENT ONLY

UPDATED MAY 13, 2020

NO CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION DATE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guidance is responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new normal that is impacting all activities including how we worship. The guidance is informed by federal, state and local orders and guidance.

This guidance assumes a modification of current orders that restrict all gatherings. The current State of California Executive Order N-33-20 directs individuals to stay home or at their place of residence except as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the federal critical infrastructure sectors.

With anticipated changes and potential modification of current state orders, this guidance provides direction to the faith-based community on what a safe re-opening looks like.

PURPOSE

Provide the faith-based community with the most current information and guidance to help make decisions on how to provide for the safety of congregations. The medical and scientific community are still learning about the transmission and impacts of COVID-19. **As evidence-based information becomes available from federal, state and local sources, this guidance will be updated.**

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

On April 28, 2020 the California Governor released [California Resilience Roadmap Stages](#). The roadmap outlines four stages for re-opening California. The stages are:

- Stage 1: Safety and Preparedness (Where we are now)
- Stage 2: Lower Risk Workplaces
- Stage 3: Higher Risk Workplaces (including in-person religious services)
- Stage 4: End of Stay at Home

The Stage 3 identifies opening higher risk environments with adaptations and limits on size of gatherings. The adaptations and limits on size gatherings have not been defined by the state. Therefore, for planning purposes, the federal [Guidelines Opening Up America Again](#) is providing guidance for this document.

There are two specific areas that particularly influence this planning. In Phase One the federal guidelines state:

- Individuals: Avoid SOCIALIZING in groups of more than 10 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing (e.g., receptions, trade shows)
- Specific Types of Employers: LARGE VENUES (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, places of worship) can operate under strict physical distancing protocols

As the state and/or local government provide further definition on adaptations and limits on gatherings, this guidance will be reviewed and updated as needed.

THIS GUIDANCE

- **Is a planning tool to assist the faith community to help apply anticipated guidance when state and local orders are modified**
- Appreciates that social distancing and sanitation practices are currently the best preventative measures for COVID-19
- Is scalable and should be informative for all faiths and places of worship regardless of size
- Includes ideas for enacting the recommendations regardless of size or worship practices
- Is a living document and will be reviewed and updated as federal, state and local orders and guidance are updated or amended
- Defines social distancing as deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. This includes staying at least six feet away from people outside your household.

REFERENCES / RESOURCES

CURRENT ORDERS

- [State of California Executive Order N-33-20](#)
- [Order of the State Public Health Officer May 7, 2020](#)
- [Stanislaus County Public Health Order Effective May 12, 2020](#)

REFERENCES

- [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community – and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control / COVID-19](#)
- [Guidelines Opening Up America Again](#)
- [Update on California’s Pandemic Roadmap](#)
- [California Department of Public Health / COVID-19](#)
- [Stanislaus County Health Services Agency / COVID-19](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The guidance was reviewed by the Stanislaus County Emergency Operations Center Director Erik Klevmyr and Stanislaus County Public Health Officer Dr. Julie Vaishampayan.

The Safe Worship Guidance was developed with input and review from the following individuals.

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HOW TO PREVENT INFECTIONS

- Leaders and congregants should stay home if they or any member of their household is sick
- Maintain [social distancing](#) of those not living in the same home a minimum of six feet
- Practice good hygiene
 - [Wash hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - Use hand sanitizers when soap and water are not readily available
 - Do not touch your face
 - Do not shake hands
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your cough/sneeze into your elbow
 - Teach and reinforce health hygiene practices
 - Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissue) to support health hygiene practices
- Encourage use of non-medical face coverings. Face coverings need to be worn properly to be effective. Face coverings should be worn while singing. ([CDPH guidance](#))

- Establish internal procedures for persons who are sick at the faith center or facility that includes
 - Keeping the sick person separate from others
 - Having disposable face coverings available
 - If needed, arranging transportation for a person who needs medical care
 - Use ventilation in vehicle by opening car windows
 - Encourage individual transportation via members of the same household
 - Do not use public transportation, ridesharing or taxis to transport ill person
 - Call 9-1-1 if symptoms warrant emergency medical services
- Consider implementing a self-screening process for attendees prior to coming to your faith gathering. The questions can be posted to your website or made available to members electronically and/or in print. If an individual answers “yes” to any of the questions, they should not attend service. Recommended self-screening questions:
 - Do you have a fever of 100.4 F or higher, or a sense of having a fever?
 - Do you have a new cough that you cannot attribute to another health condition?
 - Do you have new shortness of breath that you cannot attribute to another health condition?
 - Do you have a new sore throat that you cannot attribute to another health condition?
 - Do you have new muscle aches that you cannot attribute to another health condition or that may have been caused by a specific activity (such as physical exercise)?
 - Has any member of your household had fever or cough in the last 14 days?
- Minimize face-to-face interactions with people with respiratory symptoms
- Suspend opportunities for interactions that do not allow for social distancing (e.g., coffee stations, greeting time between services, gathering in lobby or vestibule, potlucks)

INTENSIFY CLEANING AND DISINFECTION EFFORTS

- Routinely (at least once per day, if possible) clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, sink handles, countertops, etc.)
- Sanitize between services frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, sink handles, countertops, books and worship materials etc.)
- Provide wipes so that commonly used surfaces may be wiped down (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls, etc.)
- Consider environmental controls that may prevent congregants from touching surfaces (e.g., leaving doors propped open)
- Ensure adequate cleaning and disinfection supplies
- [Reopening Guidance](#) and [Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities](#) direction is provided by the CDC

CONGREGANTS AT HIGH RISK

Congregants at high risk should be strongly discouraged from attending worship services in person.

- People aged 65 years and older
- Those with high risk conditions which can include
 - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - Serious heart conditions
 - Immunocompromised including cancer treatment
 - Severe obesity
 - Other medical conditions such as diabetes, renal failure or liver disease

IDEAS TO PROTECT THOSE MOST AT RISK

- Encourage high risk populations to continue to self-isolate and participate via online services
- Encourage communication with small groups via platforms that allow face-to-face visual
- Access to recorded services
- Identify plan/volunteers to connect with those at risk (e.g., phone calls, online, letters)

CONSIDERATION FOR MODIFYING RITES, RITUALS AND SERVICES

While we are all looking forward to returning to a normal pattern of life and faith practice, the effort required to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus has impacted all areas of life. It is not the intent of Stanislaus County to determine for you and your faith community how to modify or adjust your faith practice to support the requirement of social distancing or sanitization. Faith centers need to make every effort to provide a safe environment. As leaders, we want our congregants to feel safe during worship and to decrease their risk getting the virus. These decisions are being left to the discretion of each faith leader and community. Please consider the following as you reopen your places of worship.

- Provide a stationary location(s) and/or mail or electronic contribution options. Avoid passing any communal donation collection device.
- Modify religious activity involving communal food/drink
 - Faith leaders should always wash their hands or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol prior to conducting the service
 - Given the diversity of communal food and drink practices in our faith communities, we are asking each organization's religious leaders to practice in a manner consistent with their faith while aligning with state and county orders on social distancing and sanitization.
 - Maintain safe food handling practices
- Modify all gatherings to incorporate social distancing measures (members of an immediate household may sit together – all others should maintain social distancing)
- Drive-in worship services are permitted per the State of California legal document providing a [faith based services clarification](#)

- Consider utilizing small gatherings with inclusion of additional participants via streaming or digital options
 - Small gatherings should be at location where physical distancing can be maintained
 - Small gatherings should also be advised to follow disinfecting procedures following the gathering whether in a faith center or home gathering
 - High-risk populations should be encouraged not to attend in person
 - Physical location should be large, well-ventilated, maintaining about 6-foot distance between individuals by having members sit in alternating rows or otherwise spread out
- Consider adding or shortening worship services to allow for social distancing
- Singing should only be allowed while wearing face coverings. Singing aerosolizes the virus and accelerates transmission by propelling it farther than the 6-foot social distancing requirement.
- Regarding babies, toddlers, children, and youth ministries (Birth – 18yrs), we recommend continuing to postpone these activities or to provide them online only since it is very difficult to expect children and youth to carry out the social distancing guidelines. Families that want to attend a service should have children/youth sit with them during this season.
- Regarding water-based worship practice: Depending on the specific practice including implied urgency to a specific faith, there may be possible ways to perform these practices in a manner consistent with social distancing and sanitation rules. Please consider and apply the appropriate and safe manner for this practice within your faith community.
 - For those faiths that allow for (or do not prohibit) water treatment within their respective worship practices, please refer to the following guidance from the CDC (on the effects of chlorine and bromine on the COVID-19 virus.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html>

QUESTIONS?

Should you or any of your leaders have questions related to specific aspects of your faith practice, various faith leaders within our community have made themselves available to answer questions. Please contact the following faith leaders – if they feel unable to answer questions, they will provide you with contact information to Stanislaus County employees who will be able to assist you further. We appreciate your willingness to adjust your faith gatherings to continue to slow the spread of COVID-19.

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REVISIONS

This document may be modified as changes to state and local orders are enacted.

REVISION DATED MAY 13, 2020

This document was revised May 13, 2020 to reflect the Order of the Stanislaus County Public Health Officer Rescinding Public Health Orders effective May 12, 2020. By rescinding the local order, Stanislaus County aligned itself with the State of California Orders as they currently exist or may be issued or amended in the future.