

During these challenging times, religious entities, faith communities, and religious leaders have been working together to provide safe ways to serve and encourage their communities. This updated guidance provides recommendations for places of worship as they plan for services and operations during the next stages of Indiana's reopening. In Governor Holcomb's Stay-At-Home orders, religious entities, groups, and facilities have been deemed "essential." Both the United States Constitution and the Indiana Constitution protect the right of Hoosiers to worship and freely exercise their religion. The purpose of this guidance is not to restrict religious liberty, but to provide recommendations to places of worship and encourage safe environments during these extraordinary times.

Places of Worship are Encouraged to Conduct as Many Activities as Possible Remotely

Places of worship should continue using livestream, virtual services, and drive-in services. Faith communities and religious leaders quickly adapted to these alternative services, which continue to be recommended practices. Preparing for the livestream services and drive-in services should be conducted in accordance with Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

Places of Worship Can Continue to Slow the Spread of the Virus and Help Protect Vulnerable Members and Guests When Conducting In-Person Services

Places of worship can help play an important role in protecting the progress made by all Hoosiers who hunker down daily. Places of worship can consider implementing strategies for services held in-person with the goal of continuing to slow and contain the spread of COVID-19, while uplifting each other during this difficult time. When providing services in person, places of worship are encouraged to follow the minimum health protocols described in this document as well as guidance from the White House and CDC.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf

Recommended Minimum Health Protocols for Places of Worship

The following are the recommended minimum health protocols for places of worship in our state. Places of worship may adopt additional protocols that are consistent with their specific needs and circumstances to help protect health and safety. The virus is still impacting our communities, and we should continue to observe practices that protect all Hoosiers, including those who are at-risk and most vulnerable.

IN-PERSON SERVICES

When services are in-person, consider the following practices:

- Ask all individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home and watch services online
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
- Ensure 6 feet between individuals or family units of the same households during services
- Space and mark seating, alternating rows when possible
- Clean between each service and disinfect high-contact surfaces regularly
- Place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g. bathroom, entry, exit) and ask staff, members, and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building
- Recommend putting on a face covering before entering the building
- Consider placing signage telling staff, members, and guests to not enter if they are symptomatic or if they have tested positive for COVID-19
- Implement non-contact greetings
- Avoid handing out materials
- Keep cafés, coffee, and other self-service stations closed
- Establish safe protocols for any communion and collection to avoid contact
- Dismiss services in a way that supports social distancing
- Place readily visible signage to remind everyone of best hygiene practices

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider waiting to reopen the preschool and children areas until schools reopen. If open, do not place a mask on children age two (2) or under per CDC guidelines, and limit leaders in the preschool and children's areas to those who do not have pre-existing conditions and those under age 65.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>
- Clean entire facility (e.g. shampooing carpets, sanitizing bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones)
- Consider offering multiple service times to encourage a greater opportunity for social distancing
- Consider having a sign-up for services to allow for an attendance and capacity plan
- Consider suspending in-person praise teams or choirs and using previously taped performances. If in-person teams are used, use proper social distancing and limited team members

This Guidance Provides Only Recommendations and Suggestions

Under the exceptional times in which Hoosiers connect with their faith communities, these guidelines provide that places of worship may remain open. The guidelines only make recommendations because of the compelling interest of the state to stop the spread of COVID-19.