

Parish/Diocesan Ministries COVID-19 Preparedness Guidance

This document has been updated to reflect changes in guidance, protocols and expectations for continued mitigation of the spread of COVID-19. These updates are indicated in gray boxes with the word **UPDATED**. Updates can be found on pages 1, 3, 7 and 14.

This Guidance provides a framework in which to develop safe and responsible plans for ministries in the Diocese of Saint Cloud. This is to be used by pastors, ministry leaders and organizers and staff to ensure that efforts are safe, responsible and consistent throughout the Diocese.

UPDATED: The Diocese continues to encourage the use of virtual and hybrid meeting formats during the COVID-19 pandemic, to minimize the potential for the spread of COVID-19. **It is expected that parishes and schools will provide accommodations to allow participation of people who cannot attend in-person events, activities, classes, meetings and so forth.** This is a time to practice hospitality and care through flexible and creative solutions that continue serving the faithful, while keeping them safe.

Guiding Principles

- Mandates from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Governor's Office must be adhered to in all efforts.
- COVID-19 Preparedness Plans must be communicated clearly to parishioners and participants (website, email, mailings, e.g.).
- Proper training of staff and volunteers to understand and enact these plans is necessary to support of community health and safety.
- Each parish must have a designated COVID-19 contact person to whom questions and concerns can be directed.
- Adaptations for increased accessibility and safety must be considered to serve people with special needs and vulnerable populations.
- Diocesan Safe Environment policies must be followed for all activities involving minors and vulnerable adults.
- Events and activities must provide for appropriate hospitality to assist people in understanding and following safety measures.
- The use and maintenance of shared spaces in parishes and schools must be accounted for in all COVID-19 Preparedness Plans.
- Hosting ministry events and activities in private homes is prohibited.
- **UPDATED:** The Diocese continues to encourage the limiting use of church or school spaces to parish and schools ministries, whenever possible. If an outside group is allowed use of these spaces, the parish or school must ensure that those activities conform to the health and safety protocols and practices of this Guidance.

There are four (4) sections of this Guidance:

1. Required and recommended measures for ministries
2. Appendices with guidance for specific measures
3. Preparedness Plan checklists for events, programs and activities
4. Resources for COVID-19 Preparedness Planning

Required Measures for All Ministries

For full details, see the corresponding Appendix.

- **Health and Wellness Protocols** **Appendix A**
 - A decision tree for participation must be used for all events and activities.

- **Social Distancing and Face Coverings** **Appendix B**
 - Events and activities must allow for 6 feet or more of distance among participants.
 - Face coverings (masks) are mandatory for all people, ages 6 and up. They must be worn at all times, at all indoor events and activities, and are recommended for outdoor activities where social distance cannot be maintained.

- **Cleaning and Disinfecting Measures** **Appendix C**
 - Cleaning and disinfecting must take place before and after events and activities. Provisions must be provided for personal hygiene (sanitizer, hand washing, wipes, e.g.)

Programs with Youth and Children

Faith Formation, Religious Education, Youth Ministry,
Children's Ministry, Sacramental Preparation

Requirements

- For each event or activity, participants must be arranged in groups (see below) that do not intermix.
- Each group must be in its own room or space, or socially distanced from other groups in the same space.
- Each group must be properly supervised in accordance with Safe Environment protocols.
- Transportation to off-site activities must provide for social distancing for participants. Face coverings must be worn at all times.

Group Sizes:

Indoor

- Participant numbers are limited to both:
 - 50% maximum occupancy load of a space, with a maximum of 250, whichever is less
 - to calculate, see State Fire Marshall link in Resources
 - Social distancing among participants
- Participants must be grouped, with up to 15 persons, each
- Concurrent groups are allowed in both:
 - separate rooms/spaces
 - a common space with proper distancing between groups

Outdoor

- Participants must use social distancing
- Participants must be grouped, with up to 25 persons, each
- Concurrent groups allowed
- 250 maximum participants, with proper distance between groups

Virtual/Online

- No limit

Time Limit:

Preschool/Elementary

- Up to 2 hours

Middle/High School

- Up to 6 hours

Food and Beverages:

Pre-packaged, simple snacks (no meals) and beverages may be served under the following conditions:

- Eating and drinking does not take place in the activity space
- Sanitation and disinfecting measures take place before/afterwards
- Adults and participants wash hands before/afterwards
- Social distancing is practiced
- Adults distribute all snacks and beverages
- Sharing of food and drink is prohibited
- Home-prepared food and drink is prohibited

Recommendations

- *Encourage siblings to socially distance for consistency in practice with other participants.*
- *Whenever possible, use a space that is large enough to allow generous social distancing.*
- *Encourage participants to eat before participating in events and activities.*
- *Schedule events and activities outside of meal times.*
- *Programs that utilize Catechesis of the Good Shepherd should follow the [Considerations for Opening CGS Atria in Light of COVID-19 Concerns](#) from CGUSA.*
- *Parishes that utilize release time for Faith Formation should be in conversation with their local school district and/or Catholic school regarding how to see these programs continue.*

Programs with Adults

Faith Formation, Sacramental Preparation, RCIA,
conferences, meetings and other activities

Requirements

- Participants in events and activities must be arranged in groups (see below) that do not intermix.
- Each group must be in its own room or space, or socially distanced from other groups in the same space.

Group Sizes:

Indoor

- Participant numbers are limited to both:
 - 50% maximum occupancy load of a space, with a maximum of 250, whichever is less
 - to calculate, see State Fire Marshall link in Resources
 - Social distancing among participants
- Participants must be grouped, with up to 10 persons, each
- Concurrent groups are allowed in both:
 - separate rooms/spaces
 - a common space with proper distancing between groups

Outdoor

- Participants must use social distancing
- Participants must be grouped, with up to 25 persons, each
- Concurrent groups allowed
- 250 maximum participants, with proper distance between groups

Virtual/Online

- No limit

Time limit:

Up to 6 hours

Food and Beverages:

Pre-packaged, simple snacks (no meals) and beverages may be served under the following conditions:

- Eating and drinking does not take place in the activity space
- Sanitation and disinfecting measures take place before/afterwards
- Participants wash hands before/afterwards
- Social distancing is practiced
- Sharing of food and drink is prohibited
- Home-prepared food and drink is prohibited

Recommendations

- *Household members may be seated in units, but room capacity should still be determined by numbers using social distancing norms.*
- *Whenever possible, use a space that is large enough to allow generous social distancing.*
- *Encourage participants to eat before participating in events and activities.*
- *Schedule events and activities outside of meal times, whenever possible.*

Other Ministries

Worship

Guidance for worship and related activities is found in “The Art of Reopening our Churches for Public Worship,” available at <http://stcdio.org/coronavirus-update/>.

Catholic Schools

Catholic schools have developed individual COVID-19 Preparedness Plans for the 2020-2021 school year. Contact your school principal for more information.

Health and Wellness Protocols

Appendix A

The following protocols are in accordance with requirements from the Minnesota Department of Health guidelines for [Faith-based communities, Places of Worship, Weddings and Funerals](#).

- At-risk persons and those with preexisting health conditions are encouraged to stay home and not attend in-person activities at this time.
- Participants should screen themselves before attending any parish event or activity using a health screening tool that uses the following questions:

Have you had any of the following symptoms that you cannot attribute to another health condition?

If you answer “yes” to any of these, please stay home and contact your health-care provider.

Do you have:

Fever/feeling feverish?

Chills?

A new cough?

Shortness of breath?

A new sore throat?

New muscle aches?

New headache?

New loss of taste/smell?

- **UPDATED:** For programs involving or including youth, the [MDH COVID-19 Decision Tree for Schools, Youth and Child Care](#) must be used in the case of any symptoms of COVID-19 or suspected exposure to others with COVID-19.
- Signage with this information can be found here and should be posted at all building entrances: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf>
- The parish is not required to perform temperature checks on participants and volunteers, as long as they have proper signage for all involved to self-screen for symptoms.
- If a participant experiences symptoms of COVID-19, or tests positive following attendance at a parish sponsored activity or liturgy, the COVID contact person needs to be notified immediately.
- All COVID-19 positive persons, those who are sick or displaying symptoms of COVID-19, and those living with them, may not participate in in-person programs until after they have self-quarantined according to [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) guidelines](#) and in line with parish COVID-19 Preparedness Plan protocols.
- If the parish has a Catholic school building that is closed due to an outbreak of COVID-19 and shares facilities with parish activities and programming, in-person activities and events should be suspended until the Pastor, in consultation with the principal, public health officials and COVID contact person, determines it is safe to resume.
- If the local community experiences an outbreak of COVID-19, or if new public health or government mandates to mitigate COVID-19 are enacted, all in-person activities and events should be suspended until the Pastor, in consultation with the Diocese, public health officials and COVID contact person, determines it is safe to resume.

Social Distancing and Face Coverings

Appendix B

Social distancing is defined as a maintaining of at least 6 feet of distance between persons in indoor and outdoor settings. Planning for events and activities must allow for participants to maintain social distancing at all times. This can include:

- Establishing one-way entrances and exits in buildings
- Removal or re-arrangement of furniture and seating
- Signage to direct movement that maintains space between people
- Staggering movement of groups to avoid intermixing
- Measures to avoid and discourage physical contact outside of household members
- Holding activities outdoors or in oversized spaces whenever possible

Face coverings are required to be worn indoors by all persons age 6 and up, in all businesses and organizations in Minnesota, including churches, in accordance with [Executive Order 20-81](#).

In all diocesan ministries, face coverings are further required for use outdoors when social distancing cannot be maintained.

A face covering provides protection from airborne spread of COVID-19. To be effective, a face covering must completely and securely cover a person's nose and mouth. Acceptable face coverings include a:

- paper or disposable face mask
- cloth face mask
- scarf
- bandana
- religious face covering

Medical-grade (N95, e.g.) masks are discouraged for use outside of medical settings or specific needs of an individual as advised by a medical professional. Vented/valved masks that allow for unfiltered exhalation are not sufficient face coverings as they allow exhaled droplets to be released into the air in a manner that does not protect others. Face coverings should not be worn by children under age 2 due to risk of suffocation.

Face shields are NOT face coverings, as defined by the Executive Order. They are alternatives for use in special situations, as detailed by the [Minnesota Department of Health](#) (MDH).

Cleaning and Disinfecting Measures

Appendix C

Parishes and all on-site ministries must develop and follow measures to minimize contamination and spread of the COVID-19 virus.

- Upon entry to the building or facility, all participants should disinfect their hands with hand sanitizer wash their hands with soap and water.
- While in the building, participants should be encouraged to:
 - Wash hands with soap and water frequently
 - Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
 - Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with hands
- Personal belongings (phones, tablets, etc.) as well as writing implements and other supplies should not be shared. Plans should be developed to eliminate, or minimize the sharing of common supplies.
- Programs should have restroom protocols which allow for social distancing, regular disinfecting schedules and meeting capacity guidelines. MDH Guidance for this can be found at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf>.
- Following each event or activity, all occupied areas must be cleaned and disinfected, including restrooms, building entrances and exits, door handles, chairs, etc.
 - If events and activities will use space in a Catholic school or other shared space, the program director must coordinate with the school principal to develop a plan to ensure those spaces are appropriately cleaned and disinfected prior to the subsequent school day.
- In the event of a COVID-19 exposure, proper cleaning procedures should be followed, based on the [proper cleaning recommendations by CDC and MDH](#).

Preparedness Plan Checklist for Youth and Children Programs

Program Title _____

Program Coordinator(s) _____

Brief Program Description

Total number of participants _____

Duration of event _____

Room(s)/Space(s) used _____

Required Preparations

Each of the following preparations must be made before a program can be initiated.

___ Health and Wellness protocols have been developed for this program.

___ Social distancing and Face Covering protocols have been developed for this program.

___ Cleaning and Disinfecting measures have been developed for this program.

___ Participants in events and activities are arranged in groups that do not intermix.

___ Each group will be in its own room or space, or socially distanced from other groups in the same space.

___ Each group will be properly supervised in accordance with Safe Environment protocols.

___ Training for all involved staff and volunteers has been developed for this program.

___ COVID-19 Preparedness Plans will be communicated to participants before starting this program.
Changes to measures and protocols will be communicated promptly.

Transportation (if applicable)

_____ If transportation to off-site activities is necessary, it provides for social distancing for participants. Face coverings will be worn at all times.

Food and Beverage (if applicable)

_____ Required protocols for food and beverages are met for this program.

Brief description of food and beverage protocols used:

Preparedness Plan Checklist for Adult Programs

Program Title _____

Program Coordinator(s) _____

Brief Program Description

Total number of participants _____

Duration of event _____

Room(s)/Space(s) used _____

Required Preparations

Each of the following preparations must be made before a program can be initiated.

_____ Health and Wellness protocols have been developed for this program.

_____ Social distancing and Face Covering protocols have been developed for this program.

_____ Cleaning and Disinfecting measures have been developed for this program.

_____ Participants in events and activities are arranged in groups that do not intermix.

_____ Each group will be in its own room or space, or socially distanced from other groups in the same space.

_____ Each group will be properly supervised in accordance with Safe Environment protocols (if minors or vulnerable adults are present).

_____ Training for all involved staff and volunteers has been developed for this program.

_____ COVID-19 Preparedness Plans will be communicated to participants before starting this program. Changes to measures and protocols will be communicated promptly.

Transportation (if applicable)

_____ If transportation to off-site activities is necessary, it provides for social distancing for participants. Face coverings will be worn at all times.

Food and Beverage (if applicable)

_____ Required protocols for food and beverages are met for this program.

Brief description of food and beverage protocols used:

Resources for COVID-19 Preparedness Planning

The offices of the Diocese of Saint Cloud will provide support to pastors and parish staff members in using this guidance, as well as in particular ways to adapt ministry efforts for continuation throughout the pandemic, as shown here:

[Catholic Education Ministries](#)

Faith-formation, religious education, youth ministry, sacramental preparation, lay ministry, Catholic schools

[Communications](#)

Connecting with parishes and communities, sharing COVID-19 preparedness plans

[Office of Marriage and Family](#)

NFP Instructors, Sponsor Couples, Marriage Course

[Human Resources](#)

Parish and diocese offices and workplace settings

[Office of Worship](#)

Art of Re-Opening our Churches for Public Worship; Sacramental liturgies

Web Resources

Diocese of Saint Cloud COVID-19 Updates:

<http://stcdio.org/coronavirus-update/>

MDH Industry Guidance for Safely Reopening: Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, Weddings, and Funerals:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefait.pdf>

UPDATED: MDH COVID-19 Decision Tree for Schools, Youth and Child Care Programs:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf>

MDH COVID-19 Prevention Guidance for Youth and Student Programs:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf>

MDH Guidance for Safe Celebrations and Events:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safeevents.pdf>

Minnesota Businesses and Organizations COVID-19 Preparedness Template:

http://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/COVID_19_business_plan_template.pdf

Minnesota State Fire Marshall COVID-19 Resources:

<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/sfm/fire-code/Pages/covid-19-resources-for-businesses.aspx>

CDC Events and Gatherings: Readiness and Planning Tool:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-events-gatherings-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf>

Catholic Mutual Group COVID-19 Resources:

<http://catholicmutual.org/en-us/home/covid-19caresresources.aspx>