

Public Health – Seattle & King County Additional Information for Religious and Faith-Based Organizations

Governor Jay Inslee announced on May 28th Washington state's [plan](#) for restarting religious and faith-based services as part of Washington's "[Safe Start](#)" reopening plan. Religious and faith-based organizations in Phase 2 counties may host up to 200 people for services.

Additional guidance from Public Health – Seattle & King County regarding COVID-19 for religious and faith-based organizations is critical for our diverse communities. Public Health recognizes that places of worship are more than a place to pray; they provide community and healing, especially for injustices past and present, particularly against black, brown, indigenous, people of color. This is even more important as marginalized communities are those hit hardest by COVID-19.

Unsafe faith services have been documented in Washington State prior to the announcement of Governor Jay Inslee's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" Proclamation 20-25 and outside Washington State upon reopening. We can take a health-based approach to ensure the safety of staff, members, and visitors at faith services.

Phase 2 Services

Please refer to the Governor's guidance on [Phase 2 Faith-based and Religious Organization Requirements](#) for full details.

Can faith and religious services be held?

Yes. It is permissible to hold:

- Outdoor services on the organization's property (or immediately adjacent property if explicitly permitted by the local jurisdiction), or
- Indoor services at a place of worship with up to 25% capacity or up to 200 people, whichever is less, so long as six feet of physical distancing can be achieved between households.

If your organization has multiple rooms or another building, each can hold services for up to 25% of the space's capacity or 200 people, whichever is less, so long as each room meets the following requirements:

- Each room has a door that leads outside that can be used as the entrance and exit
 - Each room has restrooms
 - Six feet of physical distancing between households can be achieved
 - Individuals in one room shall not enter other parts of the building if they are being used for services
- Hold or provide in-home services or counseling inside a person's residence with up to five total individuals (excluding organization staff)

Any organization volunteers are included in the maximum number of permissible individuals. The services covered in these operational guidelines include all worship services, religious study classes, religious ceremonies, religious holiday celebrations, weddings, and funerals.

Organizations are strongly encouraged to keep a log of attendees at each service or counseling session, and to retain that log for at least two weeks. If an outbreak occurs, this information may be critical to help save lives.

What safety and health requirements must religious and faith-based organizations follow?

All organizations (including religious and faith-based organizations) have a general obligation to keep a safe and healthy facility in accordance with state and federal law, and comply with the following COVID-19 organization-specific safety practices, as outlined in Governor Jay Inslee's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" Proclamation 20-25, and in accordance with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces and the Washington State Department of Health Workplace and [Employer Resources & Recommendations](#).

Religious and faith-based organizations must specifically ensure operations follow the main L&I COVID-19 requirements to protect employees, members, and visitors:

- Always maintain minimum six-foot separation between all employees, members, and visitors. When strict physical distancing is not feasible for a specific task, other prevention measures are required, such as the use of barriers.
- Educate all employees in the language in which they are most proficient about COVID-19, how to prevent transmission of the virus, and the owner's COVID-19 policies. Trainings on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are available by request from Public Health – Seattle & King County.
- All employees, members, and visitors aged 5 and older in attendance must wear [face coverings](#) (or face shields only if unable to wear face coverings) before, during, and after services.
 - Exceptions: children ages 4 years and younger; those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or rely on facial cues to communicate; anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, or unable to remove the face covering without help; or anyone who has been advised by a medical professional to not wear a face covering because of personal health issues.
- Screen employees for [signs/symptoms of COVID-19 before every shift](#). Ask members and visitors to self-screen for sign/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to attending services. Anyone with a sign or symptom of COVID-19 should not attend services and should self-isolate.
 - Request employees, members, and visitors to take their temperature before attending a service. Any individual with a temperature of 100.4°F will not be permitted to attend the service or attend work at the organization.
 - Any individual with a household member who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or with symptoms of COVID-19 (including a fever above 100.4°F) may not attend the service or attend work at the organization.
- **Regularly clean and sanitize** your workplace, especially frequently touched surfaces. Follow [cleaning guidelines set by the CDC](#).
- Singing is a high-risk activity because it can spread infectious droplets. Choirs shall not perform during services. Singing by individuals is only permitted while wearing face masks.

- Disinfectants and soap and running water must be available to employees, members, and visitors. Ensure frequent and adequate hand washing with adequate maintenance of supplies.
- Members and visitors should not gather with those outside of their household before or after services.
- Members and visitors should bring their own readings. Readings and supplies provided by religious or faith organizations should be cleaned and disinfected as any other equipment involved in services.
- Staff, members, and visitors may not remove their face coverings during services. Staff must clean and disinfect any equipment that will come into contact with the lips (through a face covering) between uses.
- Staff should consider using voice amplification so that speakers behind face coverings, face shields, and physical barriers such as a plastic screen can be heard clearly.

A location-specific COVID-19 Supervisor shall be designated by the organization at each location to monitor the health of employees and enforce the COVID-19 safety plan.

An employee may refuse to perform unsafe work, including hazards created by COVID-19. Review the Governor's [guidelines](#) for religious and faith-based organizations and Washington State Labor & Industries' [FAQs on Paid Sick Leave and Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) for more information.

What additional safety practices must religious and faith-based organizations follow?

For a detailed list of these requirements, view [Washington State Dept. of Health's guidance](#).

General questions about how to comply with the agreement practices can be submitted to the state's [Business Response Center](#). All other violations related to Proclamation 20-25 can be submitted via the state's [COVID Compliance page](#).

A staff or member of my organization was sick with COVID-like symptoms or was exposed to someone with COVID-19. How long until they can rejoin services?

The staff or member may be around others again after:

- 3 days with no fever AND
- 10 days since symptoms first appeared AND
- Other [symptoms](#) have improved

A graphic representation of this is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Can funerals and weddings take place?

Funerals and weddings are critical services provided by religious and faith-based organizations. Funeral services and practices often provide healing and spiritual guidance for all faiths. Weddings can provide joy, renewal, and hope, especially during the pandemic.

In order to keep these events safe for all:

- Screen employees for [signs/symptoms of COVID-19](#). Ask members and visitors to self-screen for sign/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to attending services. Anyone with a sign or symptom of COVID-19 should not attend services and should self-isolate.
- Organizations must follow operational guidelines outlined above. Staff, members, and visitors must maintain at least 6-foot distance from others. Face coverings should be kept on for the entire service.
- Staff, members, and visitors should not hug anyone outside of their household.
- No gathering before or after the service.

Non-religious wedding and funeral services can take place if planners can meet and maintain all [requirements for religious and faith-based organizations](#). If food is served at these events, the venue must comply with [restaurant guidance](#) and only conduct activities allowable under the current phase.

How can we reduce the risk of infection while ensuring members can hear the speaker?

Staff should consider using voice amplification so that speakers behind physical barriers can be heard clearly. Those from different households must maintain at least 6-foot separation from each other at all times.

Those leading prayer who cannot wear a face mask must use a face shield or other physical barrier to reduce the risk of the risk of infection.

Electronics such as microphones should be cleaned and disinfected before and after handling by those outside of the same household. Follow manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting. If no guidance is available, use alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol. Avoid using harsh cleaning chemicals or any type of bleach. Do not spray the device directly. Use a dry, soft cloth to clean if possible. Let the device dry completely after cleaning.

Cleaning devices does not take the place of good hand hygiene. Staff, members, and visitors should wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their faces.

How can washing before prayers for Muslim communities (such as Wudhu) take place safely?

Members and visitors may consider ritual washing at home prior to arriving at services.

Faith and religious organizations must control access to washing areas and limit to no more than 2 people at a time. Individuals waiting to use the area must maintain at least 6 feet of distance between each person.

How can service goers take communion or receive the Eucharist?

Employees, members, and visitors may not come into direct physical contact. Anything to be consumed may not be presented to the members or visitors in a communal container or plate.

Faith and religious organizations must utilize single-use containers and utensils, such as cups and spoons. Employees, members, and visitors must have access to soap and running water.

Staff or those serving anything to be consumed, such as the Eucharist or sacramental offering, must wear personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves and face coverings. They must not place anything to be consumed directly into the mouth of staff, members, or visitors. Instead, staff, members, and visitors may be pick up single-use containers.

How can readings by people required to be within 6 feet, such as reading of the Torah, take place safely?

There may be no direct physical contact between employees and members or visitors. Always maintain minimum six-foot separation between all employees, members, and visitors. When strict physical distancing is not feasible for a specific task, other prevention measures are required, such as the use of barriers.

Members of the same household may conduct readings within 6 feet of one another but must keep face coverings on.

Is education available for faith leaders on how to stop the spread of COVID-19?

Yes. Public Health has extensive resources available on how [community and faith-based organizations](#), [businesses](#), and [individuals](#) can stay healthy and help slow the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, Public Health – Seattle & King County Speaker’s Bureau offers free trainings available by request. These webinars are available in multiple languages, by request.

We do not have access to enough face coverings for staff, members, or visitors. How can we access face coverings?

All employees, members, and visitors in attendance must wear face coverings before, during, and after services. Public Health’s [webpage on face coverings](#) includes an infographic on how to properly wear face coverings and a list of who is exempt from the statewide face covering requirement.

Community and faith-based organizations can request free face coverings via [this form](#). They must submit this form regardless of current or past engagement with County staff about receiving face coverings.

Individuals who live in a city can contact their city to find out how they are distributing free face coverings. Cities have received shipments of face coverings from the County.

Unincorporated area residents should watch for updates about distribution through their local unincorporated area council, local community-based and faith-based organizations. The [Public Health Insider](#) blog has detailed directions and videos for how to make a face covering, including child-sized face coverings.

Can small-group gatherings such as Sunday School and support groups for those in recovery from addiction continue?

Yes. Religious study classes, religious ceremonies, and other gatherings and services provided by religious and faith-based organizations are permitted. Staff, members, and visitors must still wear face coverings and maintain at least 6 feet of separation at all times.

Please review Washington State's complete [guidance](#) for how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in religious and faith gatherings.

Does King County provide sanitary materials such as bleach and hand sanitizer?

King County is working with regional private and public sector organizations to direct donations to agencies in need and the people they are charged to serve during the COVID-19 outbreak. Organizations may make a request via the [Donations Connector](#) where they will be matched with those making and distributing supplies such as hand sanitizer for free.