

GUIDANCE FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES ON NEW LIMITS TO CONTAIN COVID-19

On March 11, 2020, new guidance was issued to minimize the health impacts of COVID-19. Governor Jay Inslee issued an emergency proclamation prohibiting large gatherings of more than 250 people. Public Health – Seattle & King County’s Health Officer Order additionally **prohibits gatherings of less than 250 people, unless measures are taken by event organizers to minimize risk.**

This guidance document can be used to determine whether faith-based organization’s religious services meet the required measures. When determining whether to hold your religious event or service, please answer the following questions:

WILL YOUR GATHERING, EVENT OR SERVICE HAVE MORE THAN 250 PEOPLE?

If so, and it is in King, Snohomish or Pierce County, it is prohibited, both by the State of Washington and the King County Order.

IF YOUR GATHERING, EVENT OR SERVICE WILL HAVE LESS THAN 250 PEOPLE, IT IS ALSO PROHIBITED IN KING COUNTY UNLESS YOU ANSWER “YES” TO ALL OF THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:

- Have you encouraged vulnerable individuals (including those who have underlying health conditions, compromised immunity, or are pregnant) and all adults over 60 (even if healthy) not to attend?
- Have you ensured that your gathering, event or service is not dependent on leaders/organizers who are vulnerable individuals or adults over 60 years of age?
- Have you ensured that King County Public Health recommendations for limiting close contact are met? These include no handshakes or other close greetings, and no activities that require close contact (e.g., prayer next to each other, reading from a religious text together, sharing communion, etc.).
- Have you ensured that King County Public Health recommendations for social distancing are met? These include ensuring 3-6 feet of distance between individuals at all times during your gathering, event or service.
- Have you ensured that all employees and volunteers leading your gathering, event or service are screened for symptoms each day? All leaders must affirmatively indicate that they are free from symptoms including a fever, cough

or difficulty breathing before the gathering (like an affirmative certification on a plane that you can comply with the exit row instructions).

- Have you ensured that you have extra leaders/volunteers prepared so that no leader feels pressured to attend or lead if they have any symptoms?
- Have you ensured that proper hand washing and sanitation are readily available for all attendees? This includes identifying to all participants prior to the start of the gathering, event or service where the bathrooms are and encouraging people to wash their hands appropriately and often, and/or providing hand sanitizer.
- Have you ensured that the location of cleaning supplies have been identified prior to the start of the gathering, event or service?
- Have you ensured that environmental cleaning guidelines about cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces are followed? This includes cleaning high touch areas daily and after each gathering, event or service (by spraying with high-strength disinfectant, leaving on for 5 minutes, wiping, spraying again, and then letting air dry).

If you answered “yes” to ALL of the above 9 questions, then your gathering, event or service that is less than 250 people may proceed. **If you answered “no” to any of the 9 questions, then your gathering, event or service is prohibited. Violating a local health officer order is a misdemeanor.**

Public Health will not actively search for violations, but if they receive reports of events that do not comply with the Health Officer Order, they will reach out to the organizer to educate and provide guidance. Public Health’s focus is on helping people understand the importance of these guidelines rather than issue citations.

We are at a critical point in trying to contain the COVID-19 outbreak in our area. Based on public safety needs and the effort to protect our health care system from collapse, we ask all organizations, including faith-based ones, to please comply with these actions, which are the most available and effective tools to slow the spread of the virus.

We understand that cancelling religious services in particular have a significant impact on communities, congregations and organizations – religiously, spiritually, morally, emotionally and more. But this is our best chance to save lives. It supports the most vulnerable in our community and protects everyone. The more united we can be in preventing the spread, the greater the benefit for the whole community, and the sooner we can end the restrictive measures.

Your compliance is critical to save lives and assist Public Health officials in doing their job. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact PHpartnerships@kingcounty.gov or email coronavirus@kingcounty.gov.