



COVID-19 HOUSE OF WORSHIP TIP SHEET



All Houses of Worship should be ready to implement strategies to protect their congregants and staff from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. Health officials are advising that the elderly and those with chronic lung disease, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or a weakened immune system should avoid unnecessary events and gatherings. Additionally, those who feel ill or sick should not attend worship/gatherings to avoid exposing people to their illness. Respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene should be encouraged and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces should be performed regularly. Review your policies and practices to make sure they are consistent with public health recommendations. Also consider the following measures:

Trusted Information Resources:

Encourage your congregation and staff to seek information from trusted sources, and refrain from spreading false rumors. Trusted sources include:

- [Montgomery County's Coronavirus Page](#)
- The [Maryland Department of Health](#)
- The [Centers for Disease Control](#)
- [CDC Resources for Houses of Worship](#)
- [Montgomery County Public Schools](#)
- The [World Health Organization](#)

Also, encourage congregants and staff to sign up for Public Health alerts from our emergency notification system, [Alert Montgomery](#).

Share Personal Protection Measures with Congregants and Staff

Remind congregants, including children, to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and to cover their sneezes and coughs with their elbow or a tissue. Remind them to not touch their face with unwashed hands.

Tips for Gathering to Worship

- Consider equipping your worship space with livestream or webcam capability to allow those who are ill, elderly, or vulnerable to participate.
- Post signs at all entrances and communicate that people feeling ill should not attend worship/gatherings. When possible, suggest they participate by internet or livestream, and post URLs. The CDC has [print resources](#) you can use to post in multiple languages.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations in their entry or sanctuary, and make sure restrooms are well-stocked with soap and paper towels
- Religious leaders and the faithful should refrain from hand shaking, touching, embracing, or reverencing the hands/rings of clergy or ritual objects. Fist bump, elbow bump, wave, or simply bow. Liturgical greetings should be replaced by a reverent bow.
- Congregant families may sit together, but distancing of 4-6 feet between worshippers should be considered in an enclosed space.
- Consider removing shared books and encourage congregants to bring their own, or replicate all songs and prayers into photocopied bulletins that can be discarded.
- After every liturgy, all surfaces and ritual objects should be disinfected carefully. [Disinfection recommendations are provided by the CDC](#).
- Post-liturgy greeting lines should be moved outside or suspended.
- Consider conducting pastoral visits via cell phone or by videoconference.

Specific Measures for Christians:

- Consider suspending the use of holy water stations.
- Christian congregations who take holy communion from a common cup (Chalice) should refrain from self-intinction (dipping). Consider distributing a dipped host/bread into their palm.

Countering Stigma and Discrimination

COVID-19 doesn't discriminate based on race or national origin. Transmission impacts people from all walks of life in our community. Engage with stigmatized groups and speak out against negative behaviors. Call the County Office of Human Rights at 240-777-8450 with questions or concerns about discrimination.

For public health updates, congregations are encouraged to sign up for Alert Montgomery's Public Health alerts at <https://alert.montgomerycountymd.gov>.