

## Recommended Guidelines for Opening Churches from COVID-19

These guidelines are recommendations for churches in our community to begin to meet again inside their church buildings in a way that will help protect their parishioners' health as well as minister to their souls. Church leaders must understand that whenever they choose to open their facilities, they now have a greater social responsibility for keeping everyone safe. It is encouraged for churches to do a "soft opening" no sooner than the weekend of May 2 and 3 so they might have adequate time to prepare their facilities and educate their parishioners on their plans to open.

### Social Distancing

- Churches should encourage families to sit together as a family group but be seated at least 6 ft. from other families. Hugs and hand-shakes should be strongly discouraged for the next few weeks.
- Post Social Distancing reminders on doors, on video screens and make announcements. Sign might also include "If you are ill we invite you to join us for worship online until you are feeling better."
- Churches should try to limit their attendance to 30% of their seating capacity. Adding additional service times on Saturday night or on Sundays and opening up fellowship halls or balconies for seating with video screens are a possible solution. A special service time for the elderly and "at-risk" parishioners is also a good option.
- It is recommended that churches not hold Sunday School or small groups for at least a couple of weeks and not hold any special dinners or events that would bring a crowd through May.
- It is recommended that churches not offer nursery or children's church ministries for the next few weeks.

### Cleanliness and Godliness

- Offer plenty of hand sanitizer in various locations and encourage usage.
- Have volunteers do a good cleaning after each service.
- Shorten service times to 45 minutes or less in order to cut down the exposure time and to decrease the number of people needing to use the rest room.
- It is suggested to not "Pass the Offering Plate" from person to person. Some ideas are a "giving box" at the entrances, online giving or if possible, one person holding the plate at all times. Ushers are encouraged to wear gloves when counting the money.
- If your church offers communion, it is recommended to use individual communion packets. Pre-packaged ones can be purchased at most Christian Book Stores.

Churches that agree to these recommendations are asked to fill out the information below and return it to the County Health Department along with any other things your church is doing to be pro-active.

Church \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Points to consider:

Stone County has no further positive cases since the beginning of April.

Please remember your 25% capacity at this time.

Continue with basic prevention measures.

These are some ideas from the CDC website.

### **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to participants.**

Ensure that your events have supplies for event staff and participants, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks, and cleaners and disinfectants. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with detergent and water prior to disinfection, especially surfaces that are visibly dirty.

- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. Clean with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- For disinfection most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
  - A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available if needed. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
  - Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Bleach solutions will be effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
  - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
    - 5 tablespoons (1/3<sup>rd</sup> cup) bleach per gallon of water or
    - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water
- Additional information on cleaning and disinfection of community facilities can be found on [CDC's website](#).

Note: Disposable face masks should be kept on-site and used only if someone (worker or attendee) becomes sick at your event. Those who become sick should be immediately isolated from staff and participants who are not sick and given a clean disposable facemask to wear.

**Promote messages that discourage people who are sick from attending events.**

This could include electronic messages sent to attendees prior to travel to the event as well as messages requesting that people leave events if they begin to have symptoms of COVID-19, which include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Attendees should be encouraged to seek medical advice promptly by calling ahead to a doctor's office or emergency room to get guidance. See CDC guidance on what to do when sick with COVID-19.

Older adults and persons with severe underlying health conditions are considered to be at increased risk of more serious illness after contracting COVID-19. Priority should be given to ensuring the safety of these groups of people, particularly for any mass gatherings that are expected to have a large number of older adults or persons with underlying conditions.

Everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.
- Wear a cloth mask while out in public.
- Handshakes and "high-fives" are often exchanged at meetings and sporting events, and these can be ways in which COVID-19 can be transmitted from person to person. As a way of decreasing the social pressure to engage in these common behaviors, consider displaying signs (physical and/or electronic) that discourage these actions during the gathering.