

MIDDLE PA DISTRICT – CONSIDERATIONS FOR RE-OPENING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Adapted from the following resources: *Returning to Public Worship (Presbyterian Church USA)*; *CDC Document - Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*; *Ohio Citizens For Community Values Document – Guidelines For Re-engaging in Public Religious Gatherings*

HOW IS THE VIRUS SPREAD?

1. In air transmission—the virus particles can be apparently be found and transmitted for 2–3 hours in the air.
2. On surfaces—the virus particles can be found and thus transmitted for 2–5 days on various surfaces.
3. The Covid-19 virus surface is made up of a fatty substance that can be broken down by soap and water or alcohol or disinfectant.
4. Inside building factors that increase risk of virus transmission: air conditioning, sealed windows, or conditions that encourages recycling of air within a small area.
5. Close proximity to a person who is infected.
6. A person who is not symptomatic but who is infected can generate and transmit the virus for days.
7. A person who is symptomatic has a high likelihood of transmitting virus.

FACTORS OF WORSHIP TOGETHER LIKELY TO INCREASE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION

1. Singing increases likelihood of in-air transmission: Congregational singing and choral music are particularly risky activities when it comes to the spread of Covid-19, these elements of worship should be omitted when churches first return to public worship. Feature instrumental music and find other ways for worshipers to participate in musical offerings: for instance, humming with masks on, clapping or moving in rhythm, or using small percussion instruments.
2. Multiple people touching something—the virus can be picked up through people touching the same item and then touching mouth, nose, or a cut.
3. Multiple people in same room regardless of proximity.
4. Close proximity to other people. (Family units may sit together)
5. The risk increases as more people are in the same room. Each person brings the risk of the number of people with whom they have been in contact. The risk to persons who live together also increases.

SUGGESTED TRANSMISSION MITIGATION MEASURES DURING WORSHIP

1. All persons wearing **personal protective equipment** over mouth and nose—have clean personal protective equipment (PPE) available if someone is without personal protective equipment.
2. Face mask: tight weave cotton cloth, medical grade cloth, two or more layers, inserts. Face shields: clear plastic covering, covering to seal face mask, etc.
3. **Reduce or discontinue singing** or yelling as it may increase risk of transmitting virus as airborne particles.
4. **Reduce items that need to be touched.**
 - A. Door handles—can they be left open or made to open without touch?

- B. Papers, hymn books, and objects—what can be reduced?
 - C. No hugging or handshaking or touching other persons.
 - D. Reduce people allowed in one inside room at a time to reduce risk of in-air transmission.
 - E. Clean common areas that may be touched with alcohol or disinfectant.
 - F. Clean common areas that may be touched repeatedly after each touch.
 - G. Provide Individuals the opportunity to wash hands with soap and warm/hot water after touching a common element.
5. **Increased Hygiene**
- A. If possible, rearrange gathering, passage, and seating spaces in a way that allows for physical distancing to continue (although households may group more closely together).
 - B. Provide hand sanitizer and/or hand-washing stations in convenient, accessible places.
 - C. Reduce nonessential items from common spaces, eliminating surfaces of contact.
 - D. Use projection, if possible, to reduce contact with printed worship aids and books.
 - E. Clean high-touch surfaces regularly and frequently, after each service of worship or other public event. Routinely (at least once per day, if possible) clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops).
 - F. Provide additional time and coordination for gathering and sending so people can do so in a way that minimizes close contact; block doors open to reduce contact with handles.
 - G. Offer additional times for worship in order to accommodate multiple small groups, rather than a single larger assembly.
 - H. Consider alternate locations for worship, including larger rooms in the church or exterior spaces such as parks, lawns, gardens, or parking lots..
 - I. Avoid handshakes and hugs or embraces;
6. **OFFERING/FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**
- A. Develop and promote opportunities for electronic contributions, particularly for the sake of those who are worshipping at home or joining the congregation’s worship from a distance through online services.
 - B. Encourage worshipers to mail checks.
 - C. Make baskets for the offering available in prominent places (near the doors of the church or in a center aisle) to avoid the need for passing plates. Remind worshipers about this opportunity.
 - D. Provide suggestions for how members might use their time and talents for the benefit of those who are struggling with illness, isolation, or loss of income.
7. **DISMISSAL**
- A. Have a plan for the orderly dismissal of the congregation to maintain social distancing. (For example, have the last rows leave first, then second to last row, and so forth; encourage ushers to direct the process.)
 - B. Block doors open to reduce contact with doorknobs and handles and/or encourage greeters and ushers to hold doors open for worshipers to reduce contact.
 - C. No close socializing in groups in narthex or parking lot.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>