

PHASE 3

NY State House of Worship Reopening Guidelines & Recommendations

This series of House of Worship Reopening Requirements & Guidelines was created to guide congregation leaders through the New York State Governor's Executive Orders, while including practical guidance to comply with the requirements. There are four documents, corresponding to each of the four reopen phases. These were written with the understanding that the state may occupy different reopen phases at different times, depending on the rates of COVID-19 cases. The mandatory sections include all New York State required steps for houses of worship to complete during this phase of reopen, and the recommended sections provided by NYDIS list practical steps to support the completion of the mandatory Executive Orders. The checklists on each page are organized by topic.



Social Distancing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Mandatory [Under NY State Executive Orders published on June 26, 2020]

- Limit size of indoor gatherings** to no more than 50% of the maximum occupancy* of the specific area in use. *This maximum occupancy ruling is based on a [federal court ruling](#) made on June 26 overruling the NY Governor's Executive Orders.
- Outdoor gatherings of all sizes permitted** while maintaining 6 feet of social distancing.
- Obtain required permits** for outdoor gatherings. For events held outdoors in NYC, fill out [SAPO application form here](#), and for events in NYC Parks, fill out [application form here](#).
- Ensure households stay 6 feet apart** from each other at all times during indoor and outdoor gatherings.
- Require that masks or acceptable face coverings are worn** when congregants, volunteers, and/or attendees come within six feet of another person. This includes entering the facility, passing people in hallways, and occupying small spaces where 6 feet of distancing cannot be maintained.
- Facilities must provide clean face coverings** for congregants who attend the service but do not have their own appropriate face covering.
- In small spaces where social distancing is not possible** (such as elevators and vehicles), only one person at a time may use the space, unless all individuals in such space are wearing acceptable face coverings. In this case, occupancy must never exceed 50% of the maximum capacity of the space or vehicle.
- Build a physical barrier**, such as plastic shielding walls, when face masks or physical distancing is not feasible between congregants or attendees.
 - If used, physical barriers should be put in place in accordance with [OSHA guidelines](#)

Recommended

- **Seek alternatives for in-person gatherings** such as meeting via video or teleconferencing.
- **When opting for in-person gatherings, try to meet outdoors** instead of indoors to reduce the chances of airborne transmission.
- **Increase ventilation with outdoor air** to the greatest extent possible (e.g. opening windows and doors), while maintaining safety protocols.
- **Stagger schedules for staff members and volunteers** to limit amount of contact and time spent in the same area.
- **Place marking tape on the ground** to guide people to sit or stand six feet apart, including six feet of spacing for instances when they may stand in line (i.e. forming lines for the restroom).
- **Recommend the use of face coverings** at all times when indoors, even when 6 feet of distance can be maintained.

V1 as of 8.4.2020

Facilities Management & Cleaning Procedures

Mandatory
[Under [NY State Executive Orders](#)
published on
June 26, 2020]

- Adhere to hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection requirements** from [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and [Department of Health \(DOH\)](#) and maintain [cleaning logs](#) on site that document date, time, and scope of cleaning.
- Provide and maintain hand hygiene stations** on site, as follows:
 - *For handwashing:* soap, running warm water, and disposable paper towels.
 - *For hand sanitizer:* an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol for areas where handwashing facilities may not be available or practical. Hand sanitizer must be placed throughout the location for use by all congregants and attendees. It should be placed in convenient locations such as points of entrance and exit.
- Regularly clean and disinfect the facility**, conducting more frequent cleaning and disinfection for high risk areas used by many individuals (e.g. restrooms) and for frequently touched surfaces. To check if your cleaning products are effective against COVID-19, search them by name or EPA number on this [database](#).
- Frequently disinfect commonly shared objects during gatherings** to reduce the risk of hand-to-hand transmission. Encourage participants to wear gloves or practice hand hygiene before and after the handling of these items.
- Place waste bins around the facility for disposal of soiled items.**
- Be prepared to follow** the specific steps mentioned in the [CDC Disinfection Protocol](#) if someone is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.
- Determine your facility's capacity for in-person attendance** complying with the current phase mandates and inform congregants.

Recommended

- **Remove non-essential objects** in the facility that are frequently touched.
- **Discourage people from sharing** items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect in between use, such as food containers, tools, equipment, or supplies.
- **Place hand sanitizer dispensers near** shared and frequently touched objects to encourage participants to use it immediately before and after touching the object.
- **Frequently clean and disinfect smaller rooms** that have high activity, such as restrooms.
- **Routinely clean ventilation systems** to reduce the risk of airborne pathogen in the facility. See the [EPA's Ventilation and Coronavirus page](#) to learn more.
- **Create a cleaning log** which documents the date and time of disinfection procedures for each room being used in your facility. Details describing each step of disinfection should be included. To see a template created by the NYC Health Department, [click here](#).

V1 as of 8.4.2020

Worship Activities and Services

Mandatory
[Under NY State
Executive Orders
published on
June 26, 2020]

- Limit size of gathering** to no more than 25% of the maximum occupancy of the space in use.
- Limit size of gathering** to no more than 25 people for services occurring outdoors.
- Ensure people maintain 6 feet of distance between households during worship**, including when seated. Exception: when the core activity requires a shorter distance (e.g. pallbearing), participants must wear a mask.
- Ensure a distance of 12 feet** is maintained from any person that is singing or projecting their voice without a face covering. If closer than 12 feet, individuals must be protected by a face covering or a clear impermeable barrier that reaches from the ground to above their head.
- Reduce the use of objects touched by many**. For example, instead of passing an offering plate during the service, place an offering plate in a fixed location to reduce contact-to-contact virus spread. It is strongly recommended to remove all non-essential ritual objects entirely.
- Frequently disinfect commonly shared objects during worship** (e.g. prayer books, sacred objects) and encourage participants to clean their hands before and after contact with the object.
 - If cleaning or disinfection products causes safety hazards or degrades the material (e.g. religious artifact), put in place hand hygiene stations, provide gloves, and/or limit the number of individuals touching such material.
- Prohibit sharing food or beverages within the facility**. For rituals that include consumption or offerings of food or drink (i.e. communion, food offerings) find alternatives such as individual servings to reduce hand-to-hand virus transmission.
- Restrict ceremonial handholding, shaking hands, hugging, and kissing** with members of different households during services or prayers. Instead, find an acceptable alternative gesture of greeting that minimizes contact, such as a gentle bow.
- For funeral-related services**, prohibit touching, hugging, or kissing the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19, [per CDC guidance](#).

Recommended

- **Consult the CDC's [Considerations for Gatherings & Community Events](#).**
- **Hold services outdoors** whenever possible (e.g. outdoor service for religious gatherings or graveside-only service for funerals).
- **Offer multiple service times** to reduce the number of congregants together in the facility.
- **Create pre-registration for in-person gatherings** to abide by occupancy limits. To see a registration form template created by NYDIS, [click here](#).
- **Adapt ritual worship activities and remove all non-essential** items to minimize contact between individuals and commonly touched objects and surfaces.
- **Remove religious texts from use** and encourage congregation members to bring their own. Alternatively, houses of worship can use technology to project liturgy on the walls or replicate all songs and prayers into single-use photocopied bulletins.
- **Find alternatives for group singing** such as instrumental or pre-recorded music. Instruments used should be sanitized before and after each use, instrument sharing should be minimized.
- **Microphones should not be shared** between multiple people during a service. Alternatives include assigning one dedicated microphone per person or utilizing microphone covers that are replaced between each person's use.
- **Empty fonts or other water-related ceremonial spaces** to prohibit spread of the virus. Avoid rituals involving physical touch and water-based elements (i.e. water baptisms).

V1 as of 8.4.2020

Communication & Outreach

Mandatory [Under [NY State Executive Orders](#) published on June 26, 2020]

- Affirm** you have reviewed and understand [the state-issued industry guidelines](#), and that you will implement them.
- Post [CDC signage](#) throughout the facility** to remind individuals to:
 - [Stay home if sick](#) (CDC Image)
 - [Wear a face covering](#) (CDC Image)
 - [Adhere to physical distancing instructions](#) (CDC Image)
 - [Stop the spread of germs](#) (CDC Image)
 - [Follow hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfection guidelines](#) (CDC Image)
 - [Report symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19, and how they should do so](#) (CDC Image)
- Conspicuously post** completed safety plans on site.

Recommended

- Congregations should **write and implement their own Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications (CERC) Plan**. For guidance, see National Disaster Interfaiths Network's [CERC Tip Sheet](#).
- **Stay informed** about local COVID-19 information and updates. Check for updates from local health and other authorities, and share them widely with your distribution lists.
- **Maintain regular communication** with members on all of your communication platforms; be transparent about how decisions are being made and on the basis of what resources.
- **Provide accurate information** and dispel rumors about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- When announcing your plan to reopen for in-person gatherings to congregants, **include updates that detail new safety practices and procedures** your congregation has put in place. **Clearly communicate expectations** for those who may plan to attend worship (i.e. wear face covering, etc).
- **Inform congregants of maximum capacity for in-person attendance**, and conduct preregistration (either by phone or using an online form) to ensure gatherings do not exceed the limit.
- **Encourage congregants** at higher risk for severe illness to speak with their healthcare provider before attending an in-person gathering. This includes [older adults](#) and people with [underlying medical conditions](#).
- **Maintain all online services** for congregants who are unable to attend in-person gatherings.
- **Be prepared to provide additional emotional and spiritual support** to congregants during in-person gatherings, as this time apart has been particularly difficult.
- **Encourage staff and congregants** to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling. Consider posting signs displaying [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#) for confidential crisis counseling: call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
- **Offer support** to groups of people stigmatized by COVID-19 and speak out against negative behaviors to help counter stigma and discrimination.

V1 as of 8.4.2020

Regulation and Screening

Mandatory *[Under NY State Executive Orders published on June 26, 2020]*

- For every in-person gathering, keep an attendance** list with names and phone numbers of every person in attendance to aid in contact tracing of a potential COVID-19 positive case. A template attendance list created by NYDIS can be found [here](#).
- Congregations must notify the state and local health department** immediately upon being informed of any positive COVID-19 test result by a staff, clergy, or volunteer at their site.
- In the case of a faith leader or personnel testing positive**, congregations must cooperate with the state and local health department to trace all contacts in the house of worship and notify the state and local health department of all employees and visitors who entered the site dating back to 48 hours before the person began experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or tested positive, whichever is earlier, but maintain confidentiality as required by federal and state law and regulations.
- Implement mandatory [health screening assessment](#)** (e.g. questionnaire, temperature check) for clergy, lay leaders, and volunteers (but not attendees), asking about (1) COVID-19 symptoms in past 14 days, (2) positive COVID-19 test in past 14 days, (3) close contact with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case in past 14 days and/or (4) travel to high risk areas that require quarantine for 14 days after arriving in NY. Responses must be reviewed and documented each time they enter the building.

Recommended

- **Encourage people** at higher risk for severe illness to speak with their healthcare provider before resuming in-person activities. This includes [older adults](#) and people with [underlying medical conditions](#).
- **Include screening questions** in pre-registration forms for each potential attendee to fill out accurately. To see a registration form template created by NYDIS, [click here](#).
- **Implement temperature checks** at the door as one form of screening potential attendees.

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