

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies

Under the State of California “Blueprint for a Safer Economy” counties are placed a color coded tier based on several factors. As Sacramento County moves through different color tiers, the restrictions on places of worship are adjusted. The following is a summary of the restrictions under each color tier. Please check to see which color tier Sacramento County is listed under before adjusting operations. Sacramento County’s status can be found at <https://www.saccounty.net/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>

Industry	Widespread Tier 1	Substantial Tier 2	Moderate Tier 3	Minimal Tier 4
Places of Worship	Outdoor only with modifications, max 25% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is less	Open indoors with modifications, max 25% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is less	Open indoors with modifications, max 50% of capacity or 200 people, whichever is less	Open indoors with modifications, max 50% of capacity

Background

COVID-19, also known as the novel coronavirus, is a respiratory illness that is spread through the air via respiratory droplets from an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

Requirements may change. Please check Official California State Government webpages for the most current information.

Places of worship and providers of religious services and cultural ceremonies in Sacramento County are allowed to open their facilities with restrictions. [COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies](#) (State Guidelines) have been published by the State of California and must be followed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Places of worship include churches, mosques, synagogues and temples. This guidance also applies to cultural ceremonies like weddings and funerals.

Requirements may change. Please check [Official California State Government webpages](#) for the most current information.

Overview

This document provides guidance for places of worship and providers of religious services and cultural ceremonies (referred to collectively as “places of worship”) to support a safe, clean environment for workers, interns and trainees, volunteers, scholars, and all other types of workers as well as congregants, worshippers, visitors, etc. (referred to collectively as “visitors” or “congregants”). This guidance does not obligate places of worship to resume in-person activity. Further, it is strongly recommended that places of worship continue to facilitate remote services and other related activities for those who are vulnerable to COVID-19 including older adults and those with co-morbidities.

Even with adherence to physical distancing, convening in a congregational setting of multiple different households carries a relatively higher risk for widespread transmission of the COVID-19 virus, and may result in increased rates of infection, hospitalization, and death, especially among more vulnerable populations. In particular, activities such as singing and chanting negate the risk reduction achieved through six feet of physical distancing.

Required Use of Face Coverings

The use of face coverings by everyone can limit the release of infected droplets when talking, coughing, and/or sneezing, as well as reinforce physical distancing. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) released [Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings](#), which broadly requires the use of face covering for both members of the public and workers in all public and workplace settings where there is a high risk of exposure. Circumstances and exemptions are outlined in the [guidance](#). For the most up to date face covering requirements and exclusions visit cdph.ca.gov.

COVID-19 General Checklist for Places of Worship

This checklist is intended to assist places of worship and providers of religious services and cultural ceremonies with implementing a plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Make a Workplace Specific Plan. It should contain the following elements:

- Identify the person in charge of implementing the Workplace Specific Plan.
- Identify the high-risk areas and activities within the facility and the measures that will be taken to limit the risks.
- Describe how training and communication will be conducted.
- Describe how the facility will self-check for compliance with safety measures and the process for correcting any safety measures that are not being implemented properly.
- Incorporate the [CDPH Face Covering Guidance](#) into the Workplace Specific Plan and include a policy for handling exemptions.
- Identify contact information for the local health department where the workplace is located for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among workers and congregants/visitors.
- Investigate any COVID-19 illness and determine if any work-related factors could have contributed to risk of infection. Update the plan as needed to prevent further cases.
- Regularly evaluate workplaces for compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.
- Implement the necessary processes and protocols when a workplace has an outbreak, in accordance with CDPH guidelines.
- Identify close contacts (within six feet for 15 minutes or more) of an infected worker and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive workers and close contacts.

[Social distancing plan – Appendix A](#)

Provide employee training. Topics should include:

- Information on COVID-19, preventing spread, and who is especially vulnerable.
- Self-screening at home, including temperature and/or symptom checks using [CDC guidelines](#).
- The importance of not coming to work:
 - If experiencing [symptoms](#), or
 - If diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not yet been released from isolation, or
 - If within the past 10 days, had contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is considered potentially infectious (i.e. still on isolation).
- Seeking medical attention if [symptoms become severe per CDC guidance](#).
- The importance of frequent hand washing with soap and water, including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol when workers cannot wash hands).
- The proper use of [face coverings](#) and requirements for wearing them.
- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and off work time.
- Ensure that temporary or contract workers are also properly trained. Discuss plan ahead of time prior to them coming to the facility.
- Information on employer or government-sponsored leave benefits including government programs supporting sick leave and worker's compensation for COVID-19.
- Workers who receive a COVID-19 diagnosis and experiencing symptoms, may return to work only:
 - If 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, and
 - The symptoms have improved, and
 - The worker has had no fevers (without the use of fever reducing medications) for the last 24 hours.
- A worker who was diagnosed with COVID-19, but never develops symptoms must isolate at home. They may return to work after 10 days since the date of the first positive COVID-19 test.
- A worker who had close contact with a person with COVID-19 must quarantine at home. If they do not develop symptoms and are not tested, they may return to work after 10 days from the last exposure and continue to self-monitor for symptoms through Day 14. They should continue to use face coverings at all times during work and when outside the home through Day 14 after the last close contact. If they develop symptoms, these workers must self-isolate and contact their healthcare provider. Immunocompromised individuals should quarantine for 14 days as per existing recommendations.
- Proper use of face coverings, including:
 - Face coverings are not considered to be personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Face coverings help protect people near the wearer, but do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.
 - Face coverings must cover the nose and mouth.
 - Workers should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Face coverings must not be shared and should be washed or discarded after each shift.
- Information contained in the CDPH Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings, which mandates the circumstances in which face coverings must be worn and the exemptions, as well as any policies, work rules, and practices the employer has adopted to ensure the use of face coverings. Training should also include the employer's policies on how people who are exempted from wearing a face covering will be handled.

- Ensure all types of workers including temporary, independent contractors, and volunteer workers are also properly trained in COVID-19 prevention policies and have necessary PPE. Discuss these responsibilities ahead of time with organizations supplying temporary, contract, and/or volunteer staff.
- Information on paid leave benefits the worker may be entitled to receive that would make it financially easier to stay at home. Additional information at www.covid19.ca.gov is available for government programs supporting sick leave and worker's compensation for COVID- 19.
- Train and communicate with workers and worker representatives on the plan and make the plan available to workers and their representatives.

Implement Control Measures and Screening

- Complete a health survey with each employee prior to the beginning of each shift and offer temperature scans for employees. (not required, but encouraged)
- Encourage employees and congregants/visitors who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or who have family members who are ill, to stay home.
- Require frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizer. Assign staff to regularly check soap and paper towel dispensers are stocked and functional. Keep extra batteries available for motion sensing dispensers.
- Employers must provide and ensure workers and volunteers use all required protective equipment.
- Places of worship should consider where disposable gloves use may be helpful to supplement frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer; examples are for workers who are screening others for symptoms or handling commonly touched items. All workers and volunteers should wear gloves when handling items contaminated by body fluids.
- Notify employees the use of face coverings is required when engaged in work whether at the workplace or performing work off-site when interacting with the public or working in any space visited by members of the public regardless of whether anyone from the public is present.
- Post signs in strategic and highly visible locations to remind congregants and visitors that they must use face coverings, practice physical distancing and should frequently wash their hands.
- Consider the use social media, website, texts, email, newsletters, etc., to communicate the steps being taken to protect congregants/visitors and workers so that they are familiar with the policies to slow the spread of COVID-19 before arriving at the facility. Workers and volunteers are strongly encouraged to remind congregants/visitors of these practices with announcements during services or when welcoming guests.
- Remind congregants and visitors in advance to bring a face covering and make them available to anyone who arrives without one, if possible.
- Congregants/visitors should be screened for temperature and/or symptoms upon arrival to places of worship and asked to use hand sanitizer.

Social Distancing Guidelines

- Continue to provide services through alternative methods (such as via internet live and/or recorded streaming, telephone, drive-in, etc.) whenever possible.
- Refer to color coded chart on page 1 of this document for capacity maximums per tier level.
- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing of at least six feet between workers and congregants/visitors, etc.
 - Members of the same household may be seated together but should maintain at least six feet of distance from other households.
 - Consider dedicating workers to help people maintain distances during activities.

- Shorten services to limit the length of time congregants/visitors spend at the facility whenever possible (limiting speeches, asking congregants/visitors to put on garments at home before arrival, etc.)
- Consider implementing a reservation system to limit the number of congregants/visitors attending facilities at a time.
- Close places of worship for visitation outside of scheduled services, meetings, etc., whenever possible.
- Encourage congregants/visitors to meet with the same group, particularly when services meet frequently and/or require a certain number of people to be present. This can reduce the spread of transmission by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other.
- Consider offering additional meeting times (per day or per week) so that fewer guests attend meetings and services at one time. Clean meeting areas between each use.
- Discontinue large gatherings that encourage congregants/visitors to travel and break physical distances during activities, such as concerts, large holiday and life event celebrations and remembrances.
- Close play areas and discontinue activities and services for children where physical distancing of at least six feet cannot be maintained. Children should remain in the care of those in their household unit and not interact with children of other parties at any time while visiting facilities.
- Encourage congregants/visitors to physically distance themselves from others outside their household, avoid touching surfaces, and to leave the facility if they do not feel well.
- Consider limiting touching for religious and/or cultural purposes, such as holding hands, to members of the same household.
- Dedicate workers to direct guests to meeting rooms upon entry to places of worship rather than congregating in lobbies or common areas.
 - Consider using ushers to help people find places to sit and stand that are at least six feet apart from other guests/household groups.
 - Ask congregants/visitors to arrive and leave in a single group to minimize crossflow of people.
 - Welcome and dismiss congregants/visitors from altars, podiums, meeting rooms, etc. in an orderly way to maintain physical distancing and minimize crossflow of traffic, to the extent possible.
- Prop or hold doors open during peak periods when congregants/visitors are entering and exiting facilities, if possible and in accordance with security and safety protocols.
- Close or restrict common areas, such as break rooms, kitchenettes, foyers, etc. Consider installing barriers or increase physical distance between tables/seating.
- Remove from service or find low-community touch alternatives for communal/religious water containers such as fonts, sinks, and vessels. Empty and change water between uses. Where there is a possibility of contaminant splash, it is strongly encouraged to use equipment to protect the eyes, nose, and mouth using a combination of face coverings, protective glasses, and/or face shields. Reusable protective equipment such as shields and glasses should be properly disinfected between uses.
- When washing is a required activity, modify practices whenever possible to limit splashing and the need to clean and disinfect washing facilities. Encourage necessary washing to be performed at home prior to entering a facility, if possible.
- Reconfigure podiums and speaker areas, office spaces, meeting rooms, conference rooms, etc., to allow for at least six feet between people.

- Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic, if possible, and designate separate routes for entry and exit into meeting rooms, offices, etc.
- Limit the number of individuals riding in an elevator at a time. Post signage regarding these policies.
- Utilize practices, when feasible and necessary, to limit the number of workers and congregants/visitors in office, meeting spaces, etc., at one time. This may include scheduling (e.g. staggering start/end times), establishing alternating days for onsite reporting, returning to places of worship in phases, or continued use of telework when feasible.
- Consider offering workers and volunteers who request modified duties options that minimize their contact with congregants/visitors and other workers (e.g., office duties rather than working as an usher or managing administrative needs through telework).
- Stagger worker breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.
- Discontinue nonessential travel and encourage distance meetings via phone and internet.
- Close self-service item selection such as pamphlet displays and bookshelves and provide these items to congregants/visitors individually as necessary. Consider delivering items and information electronically.
- Consider limiting the number of people that use the restroom at one time to allow for physical distancing.
- Discourage workers, congregants, visitors, etc., from engaging in handshakes, hugs, and similar greetings that break physical distance. Take reasonable measures to remind people to wave or use other greetings.
- Reconfigure parking lots to limit congregation points and ensure proper separation (e.g., closing every other space). If performing drive-in services, ensure vehicle windows and doors are closed if six feet of distance is not possible between vehicles.
- Continue to support non-in person attendance of services and other related activities by those who are vulnerable to COVID-19 including older adults and those with co-morbidities.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols

- Perform thorough cleaning of high traffic areas such as lobbies, halls, and areas of ingress and egress including stairways, stairwells, handrails, and elevator controls.
- Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces including doorknobs, toilets, handwashing facilities, pulpits and podiums, donation boxes or plates, altars, and pews and seating areas.
- Establish frequent cleaning and disinfection of personal work areas such as desks and cubicles and supply the necessary cleaning products.
- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices during their shift. Cleaning assignments should be assigned during working hours as part of the workers' job duties.
- Discourage sharing items used in worship and services (such as prayer books, cushions, prayer rugs, etc.) whenever possible. Provide single use, digital copies or ask congregants/visitors to bring personal items instead.
- Avoid sharing work equipment and supplies, such as phones, office equipment, computers, etc., wherever possible. Never share PPE.
- Where such items must be shared, disinfect between shifts or uses, whichever is more frequent, including the following: shared office equipment (copiers, fax machines, printers, telephones, keyboards, staplers, etc.) and shared worship items, etc., with a cleaner appropriate for the surface.
- Ensure that sanitary facilities remain operational and stocked at all times. Provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed.

- Consider more frequently cleaning and disinfecting handwashing facilities that are used more often. Use signage to reinforce handwashing.
- Disinfect microphones and stands, music stands, instruments and other items on pulpits and podiums between each use. Consult equipment manufacturers to determine appropriate disinfection steps, particularly for soft, porous surfaces such as foam mufflers.
- Optional: Consider using disposable seat covers for congregants/visitors, particularly on porous surfaces or where a facility has multiple daily services. Discard and replace seat covers between each use. Provide disposable or washable covers on pillows used as seating on floors and change/wash them after each use.
- Provide hand sanitizer dispensers, touchless if possible, at entrances and contact areas such as meeting rooms, lobbies, and elevator landings.
- Use disinfecting products that are on the EPA list of approved products against COVID-19 and follow product instructions.
 - Provide workers training on the chemical hazards, manufacturer’s directions, ventilation requirements, and Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use.
 - Workers and volunteers using cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves or other protective equipment as required by the product instructions.
 - Follow the [asthma-safer cleaning methods](#) recommended by the California Department of Public Health and ensure proper ventilation.
- Wash religious garments and linens after each service or event, at the highest water setting possible. Ask congregants/visitors to bring their own storage bags for personal garments and shoes. Workers, congregants, and visitors should wear gloves when handling others’ dirty linens, shoes, etc.
- Discontinue passing offering plates and similar items that move between people. Use alternative giving options such as secure drop boxes that do not require opening/closing and can be cleaned and disinfected. Consider implementing digital systems that allow congregants/visitors to make touch-free offerings.
- Mark walking paths between spaces designated for congregants/visitors to sit/kneel so that people do not walk where someone may touch their head to the floor.
- Where possible, do not clean floors by sweeping or other methods that can disperse pathogens into the air. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter wherever possible.
- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building’s air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in worship areas, offices, and other spaces.

Please note: For high touch surfaces where chlorine bleach may be used, the CDC recommends mixing 1/3 cup of chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented bleach or “no-splash” bleach.

Considerations for Places of Worship

- Discontinue offering self-service food and beverages. Do not hold potlucks or similar family-style eating and drinking events that increase the risk of cross contamination. If food and beverages must be served, provide items in single-serve, disposable containers whenever possible. Workers or volunteers serving food should wash hands frequently and wear disposable gloves.
- Consider modifying practices that are specific to particular faith traditions that might encourage the spread of COVID-19. Examples are discontinuing kissing of ritual objects, allowing rites to be performed by fewer people, avoiding the use of a common cup, offering communion in the hand instead of on the tongue, providing pre-packed communion items on chairs prior to service, etc., in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Considerations for Marriages and Cultural Ceremonies

Marriage ceremonies and other religious/cultural ceremonies are permitted under the worship guidelines, however receptions are not.

Receptions are gatherings of people from separate households that generally involves eating, drinking, and socializing. This type of event has been strongly linked to the spread of COVID-19. Please refer to the current County and State orders for the latest information regarding private gatherings.

Considerations for Funerals

- Consider reduced visitor capacity and stagger visitation times at funerals, wakes, etc., if possible. Follow all cleaning and disinfection measures as described in this guidance. Whenever possible, remind visitors to maintain physical distance from each other, from workers and volunteers, and from the deceased.
- Consider modifying religious or cultural practices when washing or shrouding bodies of those who have died from COVID-19, in accordance with guidance from CDPH and the CDC. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, work with funeral home staff and families to reduce exposure as much as possible. All people participating in these activities must wear disposable gloves and if there will be splashing of fluids, people must use additional protective equipment including protection for the eyes, nose, and mouth, such as face shields.
- Refer to color coded chart on page 1 of this document for capacity maximums per tier level.
- Consider other recommendations and modifications of services related to places of worship outlined above, as applicable for funeral services.

Resources:

[Statewide Industry Guidance: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies](#)

[Sacramento County COVID-19 Updates](#)

[CDPH Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)

[Cal/OSHA Interim General Guidelines on Protecting Workers from COVID-19](#)

Summary of Revisions

8/13/2020: Initial version

9/8/2020: Updated wording on page one to "current Public Health Order". No other changes made.

9/29/2020: Updated page 1 with color coded chart and removed requirements for outdoor services only.

10/22/2020: Added capacity information for funeral services.

11/23/2020: Updated link for CDPH guidance for face coverings. Updated link for CDPH guidance for face coverings. Added examples of places of worship and this guidance also applies to weddings and funerals.

12/4/2020: Added considerations for marriages and cultural ceremonies.

12/28/2020: Added information the requirements remain unchanged for Regional Stay at Home Order and Tier 1, Purple. Updated quarantine requirement to 10 days for asymptomatic individuals, both tested and untested.

1/7/21: Removed 3 household statement under marriage section to align with current public health order.

1/13/21: Removed Regional Stay at Home Order information from p.1. to align with public health order dated 1/13/21.

PHO: 1/13/2021