



COVID-19: Recommended Preventative Practices and FAQs for Faith-based and Community Leaders

PLEASE NOTE: *The following recommended preventative practices and answers are in response to common questions we have received and are based on what is currently known [about the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). Should you have questions not listed below, please contact the Partnership Center: partnerships@hhs.gov or 202-260-6501. We will do our best to respond in a timely fashion and will continue to update this document as further questions and information come to our attention.*

Primary Resources

- Follow The [President's Coronavirus Guidance for America](#).
- For updates on the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [dedicated website](#). Also available in [Spanish](#).
- For local information and recommendations on community actions designed to limit exposure to COVID-19, check with your [state and local public health authorities](#).
- For guidance and instruction on specific prevention activities related to your community's tradition and practices, refer to your national and regional denominations.

The Role of Faith-based and Community Leaders

Faith-based and community leaders continue to be valuable sources of comfort and support for their members and communities during times of distress, including the growing presence of COVID-19 in different parts of the country. As such, **these leaders have the unique ability to address potential concerns, fears, and anxieties** regarding COVID-19. Additionally, by reiterating simple hygienic precautions and practices, these **leaders can broadly promote** helpful information, managing fear and stigma, and restoring a sense of calm into the lives of those in their care.

Such leaders are also poised — through their acts of service and community relationships — to reach vulnerable populations with essential information and assistance. These acts of service are an essential part of the safety net for the vulnerable in their communities.

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Recommended Preventative Actions for Your Community

1. Follow CDC and White House Recommendations

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Communities are encouraged to follow CDC recommendations and The President's Guidance to America to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus including:

- Avoid gatherings of 10 or more people.
- Work and engage with your community from home.
- Do not visit nursing, retirement, or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance.
- **Advise your community to:**
 - **Stay home if they are sick**, except to get medical care.
 - **Cover their coughs** and sneezes with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash.
 - **Wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds** — especially after touching any frequently used surface.
 - **Avoid touching their face.**
 - **Thoroughly and repeatedly clean high-contact surfaces** and objects.
 - **If they are an older person, request that they stay at home and away from people.**

2. Follow Guidance for Prevention and Preparedness Activities

- Review the CDC's ["Interim Guidance: Get Your Community- and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)."](#)
- Check with [your state and local health authorities](#). Public health officials may recommend community actions designed to limit exposure to COVID-19, depending on the risk of an outbreak or the severity of an outbreak.
- Visit the CDC, HHS, and Partnership Center social media sites for the latest information and access to downloadable signage for your facilities.
 - Twitter | CDC: [@CDCgov](#); HHS: [@HHSGov](#); and CFOI: [@PartnersforGood](#)
 - Facebook | CDC: [@CDCgov](#); HHS: [@HHSGov](#); and CFOI: [@HHSPartnershipCenter](#)
 - Instagram | CDC: [@CDCgov](#) and HHS: [@HHSGov](#)

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3. Follow The Recommendations Issued by the Leadership Of National Denominations, Faith Groups, and Community Service Organizations

Including recommendations and best practices, such as:

- Using technology to continue worship services, in-person counseling, meetings, and services events. Increasing the use of email, conference calls, video conferencing, and web-based seminars;
- Ensuring community contact lists are up-to-date and that ‘calling trees’ — or other practices to account for individuals who may be living alone, elderly, and vulnerable — are in place;
- Planning ways to continue essential services if onsite operations are scaled back temporarily. Providing web- and mobile-based communications and services, if possible;
- Turning the community’s attention toward being of service to vulnerable members of your immediate and local community;
- Acknowledging that this as a time of heightened stress and anxiety for the community, and responding with practices appropriate to your organization’s mission or faith tradition like prayer;
- Conducting care visits by phone or virtually, especially if the individuals are in quarantine, isolation, or are taking precautions by staying at home; and
- Establishing the routine cleaning of sanctuaries, food service areas, and other communal spaces.

4. Make Plans that Prepare and Serve Your Community

- Review regularly your national and regional communications for guidance and instruction on specific prevention activities relative to your community.
- Here’s a suggested planning outline:
 - **FIRST: Staying Connected.**
 - Ensure community contact lists are up-to-date and that ‘calling trees’ — or other practices to account for individuals who may be living alone, elderly, and vulnerable — are in place;
 - Establish a clear process for communicating the “connection plan” to the community; and
 - Think creatively about the various ways the community can stay connected virtually (e.g., virtual small groups, visitations, daily prayers and worship, e-newsletters, and other communications).
 - **SECOND: Providing Ongoing Care and Services.**
 - Confirm that plans are in place to care for community members, especially in cases where individuals live alone or are in quarantine or isolation. For example, organizing weekly calls to individuals and families confined to their homes;
 - Prepare for leadership coverage in case staff become ill;
 - Protect workers who clean and maintain religious facilities and fellowship centers from exposure to the virus and other workplace hazards, such as disinfectants used

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for cleaning, and train them on how to do their jobs safely, use any necessary personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves), etc. Consider recommendations from the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) and [CDC's cleaning/disinfection guidance](#); and

- Pay special attention to nursery and childcare facilities. Ensure children's areas (including toys) are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before and after use.
- **THIRD: Maintaining Operational Continuity, Support Staff, and Those Whom You Serve.**
 - Make necessary preparations to handle the business and operations of the community;
 - Consider strategies to address the ongoing financial needs of staff: employee payroll, tele-work accommodations, etc. Especially consider staff who depend on hourly wages and may lack health insurance;
 - Keep food pantries well-stocked and include cleaning and sanitizing products; and
 - Learn how to conduct small and large meetings by electronic means. Consider how to continue relationships and classroom activities, such as mentoring or ESL classes.
- **FOURTH: Joining Partnerships to Serve your Community.**
 - Consider how the resources of your community can assist with the special needs of the vulnerable and/or isolated populations by collaborating with service agencies in your area. Examples include:
 - Collaborating with local schools to support students who rely on the school meals program if the school closes;
 - Donating and distributing groceries for the elderly and medically vulnerable;
 - Raising money for grocery gift cards to support low-income families impacted by the crisis; and
 - Supporting students through campus-based faith groups (especially international), who are separated from their home community.
 - Communities with more advanced technological assets (teleconferencing, established systems to live-stream events, etc.) may partner with other entities to help stay connected; and
 - Consider how your community might partner with local public health officials in providing the most up-to-date information and guidance.



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- **FIFTH: Becoming Aware of Resources for Your Community.**
 - Explore federal, state, and local resources that may benefit those experiencing hardships related to the COVID-19 crisis, including:
 - U.S. Department of Labor’s [Unemployment Insurance](#) available through the states;
 - U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service [provides a list of services and waivers](#) that exist in each state to address those who are food insecure;
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services includes information on [how to apply for food stamps or SNAP benefits](#);
 - [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) (SBA) has a number of resources available for small businesses affected by COVID-19 including low-interest [loans](#) available through States to small businesses and non-profits severely impacted by COVID-19; and
 - Other resources that may be particular to your state.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- **What Are the Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19?**
 - Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to [severe illness and death](#) for confirmed COVID-19 cases. The following symptoms may appear 2–14 days after exposure:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath

- **Should We Have a Gathering at All?**
 - The [President’s Coronavirus for America](#) recommends avoiding social gatherings of 10 or more people. Check with your [state and local health authorities](#) for the latest information. Public health officials may ask you to modify, postpone, or cancel events if it is necessary to limit exposure to COVID-19. Be mindful of the vulnerable members of your community and seek to protect them from exposure to other people.
 - Review [“Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission.”](#)
 - Use the [CDC’s Guidance on Mass Gatherings](#) as a guide for reviewing your community’s calendar and making decisions on *which* events you may need to cancel and by *when*.
 - Track efforts by the federal government by following these websites:
 - English: www.U.S.A.gov/Coronavirus
 - Spanish: <https://gobierno.U.S.A.gov/Coronavirus>

- **Are Elbow Bumps Enough to Keep Us from Spreading the Virus?**
 - Practice social distancing however possible — staying at least six feet away from other persons.
 - Review the [“Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)”](#) for best practices.
 - At this time, community members should not hug or touch one another, but offer hand signals like a peace sign or the [American Sign Language sign for “I Love You.”](#)
 - Greeters at all gatherings should be especially aware and refrain from offering handshakes. As one community noted, “Greeters can model hospitality with their words and their smiles.”

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- **What Should I Tell People Who Are Concerned?**
 - Reassure them that your faith- or community-based organization, as well as local, state, and national authorities, is taking all necessary precautions to ensure their health and safety. **Your response can soothe concerns** and create an atmosphere of calm. The best way to prevent illness is to practice routine and common sense hygiene practices. These everyday practices also help to prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including the flu:
 - **Stay home when you are sick**, except to get medical care.
 - **Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue** and then throw the used 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 readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol**.
 - **Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands**, especially your eyes, nose, or mouth.
 - **Clean high-contact surfaces and objects thoroughly and repeatedly**.
 - Leaders may find it helpful to review the guidance provided by the CDC in its [“Interim Guidance: Get Your Community- and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\).”](#)
 - Check with your state and local health authorities to learn if your community has experienced a COVID-19 outbreak.

- **How Can We Advise the Elderly, Those with Special Health Considerations, Their Caregivers, and Other High-Risk Populations?**
 - Provide special consideration in communicating risk to vulnerable populations in your community, including [older adults](#) and others with access and/or functional needs. Assign, or encourage those whom you serve to seek out, a “buddy” who will check in on and help care for them, should they get sick.
 - Make plans to stay connected.
 - Ensure community contact lists are up-to-date and that ‘calling trees’ — or other practices to account for individuals who may be living alone, elderly, and vulnerable — are in place.
 - Convey ways they can stay connected via virtual worship, gatherings, and staff and leadership meetings.
 - Ensure there are clear means to communicate any “connection plans” with them.

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- **What Should I Do if Someone at a Community Gathering Says They Are Feeling Sick?**
 - Identify space in your facility or event to separate people who may become sick and may not be able to leave immediately.
 - Designate a separate bathroom for those who are feeling sick. Develop a safe plan for cleaning the room regularly.
 - Isolate the individual immediately from staff and participants.
 - Assist the person in **CALLING AHEAD** to their health care professional if they have a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing. Tell them to avoid taking public transportation, ride-shares, and taxis.
 - People with a confirmed case of COVID-19, with a loved one in the home with a confirmed case, or those experiencing symptoms should remain under home isolation. The decision to discontinue home isolation precautions should be made on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with health care providers and state and local health departments.
 - For more information: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html.

- **Is Information About COVID-19 Available In Spanish?**
 - The following website provides a wide range of information on COVID-19 in Spanish: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index-sp.html
 - Los Centros para el Control y la Prevención de Enfermedades (CDC) tienen información en español sobre COVID-19 en su sitio web en www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index-sp.html

- **Does the Virus Live on Surfaces?**
 - **COVID-19 is a new disease and experts are still learning how it spreads.** It may be possible to be exposed to COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes; however, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Review the CDC's "[How COVID-19 Spreads.](#)"
 - **Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects several times daily** (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, cabinet handles, smart phones, and keyboards) using an appropriate cleaner to minimize the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in your community. 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 [here](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
 - If an object is touched frequently, for example as a part of religious observance, it should be cleaned after each use.
 - If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent and water prior to disinfection.



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- For the future, consider ways your community can reduce the number of objects that are collectively handled.
 - For example, consider no longer passing offering plates down the row; instead, place the offering plate on stands and ask people to leave their offering. Remind those who oversee and administer offerings, or similar items and elements, to wash their hands before and after administration or use.
 - Organizations may also consider removing shared books and encouraging people to bring their own.
- **What Type of Items Should We Have in Our Emergency Preparedness Kit?**
 - Consider always having supplies on hand, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, extra tissues, and trash baskets.
 - Refer to the CDC's "[Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities](#)" for additional information about supplies and materials.

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