Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It has spread from the first cases identified in China to many other countries including the United States. The number of COVID-19 cases in Los Angeles County continues to rise, including many cases due to community transmission of COVID-19. With the rise in cases has come a rise in serious illness among county residents and of deaths due to COVID-19.

The following guidance for faith-based organizations may help to prevent exposure to COVID-19 and thus help reduce its spread. It is of utmost importance that we avert a peak in serious illness that would strain hospital capacity. Your assistance in that effort is critical.

To help slow the spread of COVID-19, a revised Health Officer Order issued on March 21, 2020, required that all businesses other than those that provide essential services cease in-person operations and that all county residents other than those providing essential services remain at home. The order prohibited any public or private in-person gatherings.

A March 25th order further required that individuals infected with COVID-19 self-isolate at home for AT LEAST 7 days AND for 3 days after symptoms have improved and the person no longer has a fever, without use of fever-reducing medications. The same order required anyone who has had close contact with a person with confirmed or suspected infection to remain at home in quarantine for 14 days after exposure. This period has been judged adequate to determine their own infection status and permit appropriate steps if they do develop symptoms.

The following are recommendations to help prevent the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19 in your faith-based organization, in the context of these Health Officer Orders. We encourage you to visit the DPH Novel Coronavirus webpage for resources including FAQs about the COVID-19, Guidance for Managers, and infographics: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/. This guidance will be updated as needed to reflect changing conditions.

TAKE PRECAUTIONS FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY

Encourage members of your community to carefully follow guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There is currently no vaccine or cure for COVID-19. There are, however, preventive steps to prevent spread of viral infections like COVID-19:

- Wash hands often and thoroughly. Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for at least 20 seconds.
- Limit close contact with other people. Try to keep at least 6 feet between yourself and others whenever possible. And keep face-to-face time with other people to under 10 minutes.

- □ Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. Use household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for the surface, following label instructions for safe and effective use. You can find the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) environmental disinfection recommendations at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html
- □ Do not share objects such as utensils, cups, food, and drink.
- □ Limit skin-to-skin contact (handshaking, hugs, etc.) with others.

Take steps to stay healthy. Make sure you don't unnecessarily expose yourself to COVID-19 infection or spread the infection to others. Be particularly careful to follow the guidelines above in interactions with people in high-risk groups:

- People who are 65 or older,
- People who are immune-suppressed or have weakened immune systems (such as HIV or cancer),
- People with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, lung or heart disease,
- People who are pregnant.

If you, a parishioner or a staff member becomes ill, take steps to prevent spread of the infection to others:

- Stay home or go home as soon as possible. If your symptoms are mild and you are not at high risk, you do not need to contact your physician but avoid contact with other people until you can get home and isolate yourself.
- Once home, watch for signs of a worsening condition, such as rapid breathing, shortness of breath or dehydration (unable to keep fluids down), if these occur contact your health care provider immediately.
- **Remain at home (self-isolation) and away from others for AT LEAST 7 days after symptoms started AND 3 days (72 hours) after symptoms are improved and fever resolves without the use of fever-reducing medications**.
    - This means that if you feel symptoms for just 1 day, you must be home for the required 7 days. While at home, be careful about practicing infection control to avoid infecting family members.
- **All members of your household and anyone with whom you have had close contact (less than 6 feet) at any time starting two days before you had symptoms for 10 minutes or more is considered to be exposed. Close contact is also defined to include direct exposure to body fluids (for example, from a sneeze or cough or use of shared utensils). The March 25th Health Officer Order requires that they remain quarantined at home for 14 days. This period covers the window of time in which symptoms are likely to emerge if the person is infected.**
    - Guidance for home quarantine can be accessed at COVID-19 Quarantine Guidance. If they do become symptomatic during the 14-day quarantine period, they must initiate isolation and remain in isolation, as above, for a minimum of 7 days after the start of their symptoms. Their close contacts are required to initiate home quarantine.

KEY GUIDELINES FOR FAITH-BASED LEADERS DURING COVID-19

1. ALL in-person gatherings with the exception of funerals as described below are prohibited until further notice.
2. Worship services, including those that occur around Easter or Passover, must be live-streamed, recorded, or taped.
3. All baptisms, weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, confirmations and other life cycle events other than funerals must be conducted virtually or postponed.
4. Activities of your organization that involve essential services, such as the provision of food, must be carried out in compliance with social distancing and hygiene protocols.

GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING FUNERALS

Funerals and graveside services can take place with the following requirements:

- Services may only take place at the funeral home or location of burial or cremation.
- Attendance must be limited to:
    - Members of one household of up to ten (10) people (members who live together at the same physical address);
    - One person who may view the decedent to confirm the identity as required by the mortuary, funeral home, or embalming service;
    - Essential funeral service staff; and, if desired,
    - One faith leader.
- Social distancing rules must be followed. That means at least 6 feet between household members in attendance and the funeral staff and faith leader.
- The service may livestreamed to permit virtual participation of others (see webcasting resources from the National Funeral Directors Association). It may also be taped for later viewing. In either case, recording must be carried out by a family member or funeral staff person.
- People who feel sick or are at-risk for serious disease from COVID-19 should stay home.
- Tissues and alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be provided for use by families and staff and restrooms must be stocked with an adequate supply of soap and paper towels. Waste bins should be readily available for the disposal of tissues and paper towels.
- People should not touch or kiss the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. If touching occurs, the person should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer prior to touching their face and anything or anyone else.
- Keep the front door open (weather permitting) or ensure a staff person is always available to open a door as permitted participants arrive to limit the need for people to touch the doorknob.
- Limit the use of objects, equipment, and supplies that may be difficult to disinfect or make it hard to ensure social distancing (e.g. tent walls).

OTHER CONCERNS OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY

1. **Worship service must be live-streamed, recorded, or taped.** Absolutely NO in-person gatherings are permitted. Congregational leadership may determine how worship service duties, including technical broadcasting or recording duties, are to be arranged. You may want to arrange for tech-savvy parishioners to provide over-the-phone or online technical assistance to less tech-savvy parishioners, so the latter can get online and make use of virtual options. This could be a great way to give younger parishioners a way to contribute to community wellbeing.

2. **Food distribution and clothing ministries, if your FBO conducts them,** must be "grab and go," or no contact drop-off. Preparation and assembling of food boxes/bags, clothing, infant and baby supplies, etc. must adhere to the six-feet social distancing protocol. You can find more information at COVID-19 Food Delivery Guidance for more guidance regarding food distribution.

3. **Housing and Shelter ministries –** There is a serious risk that a case of COVID-19 in a homeless shelter might lead to the rapid spread of disease in a vulnerable population and jeopardize the health and safety of your residents and staff. You can find critical information at COVID-19 Guidance for Homeless Services about specific actions required of homeless service providers to avert the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19.

4. **Home, hospital, hospice, assisted living, rehabilitation center, or ANY type of visit to ANY institution** should be conducted through virtual technology (telephone, Zoom, facetime, google hang-out, etc.) to the extent possible. Faith leaders administering last rites or attending to the needs of the sick in person are to comply with hospital visitation rules and observe all proper sanitary protocols including the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In a hospital setting, check in with the proper medical personnel and follow their directions before entering and upon leaving the room of the patient. For home visits, this includes handwashing before and after the visit, wearing gloves, a facemask and a gown to cover clothes. All religious practices such as the sharing of communal sacramental cups and wafers, or practices such as the use of anointing oils and holy water must be suspended.

5. **Weddings, baptisms, infant dedications, bar and bat mitzvahs, and confirmations** must be postponed. When feasible, ceremonial gatherings can be conducted virtually.

6. **Funerals, Burial Services, and Death Rites.** All public gatherings related to funeral services, graveside services, visitations, and vigils are suspended. Cemeteries and crematoriums are able to provide direct burials and cremation services but without a gathering of people. Immediate family members who live together and a faith leader may gather in person at a cemetery but are encouraged to reach out directly to the funeral home to understand specific protocols and whether they provide livestream services. Memorial services should be postponed and can be scheduled for a later date.

7. **Clergy and pastoral care** (counseling, crisis intervention, marital counseling, etc.) must be conducted virtually (telephone, Zoom, Facetime, Google hang-out, etc.).

8. **ANY and ALL groups/ministries that typically meet in addition to worship service** must be conducted virtually or postponed including, but not limited to:

    - Community groups
    - Small groups such as men's and women's gatherings
    - All children's, young adult, and older adult ministries
    - Recovery and support groups including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), bereavement, divorce, etc.
    - Congregational Committees
    - Sports and arts ministries
    - Meditation practices

9. **Holy Week and Passover.** We are coming up on a holy time for many faith-based organizations (i.e. Passover and Easter). These celebrations are significant, longstanding traditions that may be especially important for families now. We encourage you to celebrate virtually and to help parishioners be creative about engaging children, youth, adults, and elders in services and traditional events via livestream.

Faith leaders clearly have a key role to play in offering comfort and care to Los Angeles County at a time when illness, isolation and economic hardship come together to burden so many residents and communities. We ask for your support and leadership in helping us mitigate those burdens by reducing spread of COVID-19, assuring optimal care for those who become ill, and speeding community recovery.

RESOURCES

If you need help finding social services or medical care, call the Los Angeles County Information line 2-1-1, which is available 24/7.

- What You Should Know (Infographic)
- How to Cope with Stress (available in several languages)
- Handwashing
- What If I'm Exposed
- Home quarantine guidance for close contacts to COVID-19
- Home care instructions for people with Respiratory Symptoms
- What to do if you have symptoms of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Infographic/poster)

Other reliable sources of information include:

- California Department of Public Health (CDPH, State)
  - https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, National)
  - http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html
- World Health Organization (WHO, International)
  - https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus
- National Funeral Directors Association
  - https://nfda.org/covid-19

We appreciate your commitment and dedication to keeping Los Angeles County healthy.