



**SECTOR SPECIFIC WORKPLACE STANDARDS  
FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES TO ADDRESS COVID-19  
Updated as of December 11, 2020**

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**Purpose**

**These workplace safety standards for Places of Worship and Religious Services, are posted in advance of their effective date to allow Places of Worship and Religious Services time to prepare to operate in compliance with these mandatory health and safety standards. Places of Worship and Religious Services remain subject to the previously-issued, October 29, 2020 safety standards until these revised workplace safety standards go into effect on December 13, 2020.**

These sector specific COVID-19 safety standards for Places of Worship and Religious Services are issued to provide instructions to help protect against the spread of COVID-19 as the number of persons attending in-person services increases.

These standards are minimum requirements only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The public health data and matrix for disease prevention upon which these guidelines are based can and does change frequently, and the operator of a Place of Worship is responsible for adhering to all local, state and federal requirements.

Violation of these standards may result in civil fines of up to \$500 per violation; provided that each individual instance of non-compliance and each day of a continuing violation may be fined as a separate violation. Each person present over any capacity limit specified below may likewise be fined as a separate violation.

**General Standards**

These standards apply to all Places of Worship and Religious Services, and all services and activities including regular and holiday services, weddings, funerals, wakes, support group meetings, and other related gatherings.

Places of Worship shall communicate to members and workers that they **should not** attend services in-person if any of the following are true:

- Member or worker is experiencing any symptoms such as fever (100.0 and above) or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle/body aches, runny nose/congestion, new loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Member or worker has had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19. “Close contact” means living in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g., sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, while that person was symptomatic
- Member or worker has been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by their doctor or a local public health official

Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home.

Places of Worship are encouraged to hold services virtually or outdoors and to ensure that attendees who are not from the same immediate household are spaced at least 6 feet apart. When conducting services, places of worship must abide by the following requirements.

### **I. Occupancy Limitations**

- For indoor services, places of worship must monitor member entries and exits and limit occupancy at all times to the greater of the following:
  - 40% of the building's maximum permitted occupancy as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder
  - Buildings for which no permitted occupancy limitation is on record may allow 8 persons (including staff) per 1,000 square feet of accessible space
  - In any case, no enclosed space (e.g. a single room, basement) within the building may exceed occupancy of 8 persons per 1,000 square feet
  - All occupancy counts and calculations shall include attendees, staff, and other workers
- If feasible, places of worship are encouraged to arrange online sign-up for services in advance in order to monitor and limit the number of attendees

### **II. Social Distancing**

#### Seating

- Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart
- If there is fixed seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows
- Places of worship are encouraged to place tape or other visual distancing markings on seating to delineate 6 ft separations and to post signage indicating the maximum number of persons permitted per row
- Promote ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible. For example, consider opening windows and doors to allow airflow

#### Entering and Exiting

- Places of worship are encouraged to take steps to encourage orderly entering and exiting of services in a manner that encourages social distancing. For example:
  - Signage or floor markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting the service
  - If a line forms outside of the service, those waiting should be directed to maintain social distancing. Tape or other markings on the ground outside of Places of worship should be placed to encourage attendees to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet
  - Staff should direct people in high traffic areas to help maintain social distancing
  - Officiants or other staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting

### **III. Face Coverings**

- All attendees and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 Order

No. 31 and the [Department of Public Health's Guidance](#) while inside and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition

- A leader or celebrant engaged in conducting the service or making an address may remove his or her face covering while doing so, provided that he or she is able to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other persons present; installation of protective, plexi-glass or other transparent barriers is recommended for lecterns and other points of address
- For children between age 2 and 5, the wearing of a face covering or mask is at the discretion of the child's parent or guardian. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face covering or mask
- A person who declines to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition shall not be required to produce documentation verifying the condition
- Place of worship may refuse entry to a person who refuses to wear a face covering or mask for non-medical reasons

#### **IV. Contributions and Communal Food, Drink, and Sacraments**

- Places of worship are encouraged to modify the means to collect any financial contributions from attendees so as to eliminate shared contribution trays and baskets and to minimize contact. Consider setting up a no-touch method to collect contributions, and encouraging contributions through mail or electronic means
- Places of worship are encouraged to modify communal rituals, like taking communion or passing of the peace, so as to limit contact with others. Consider distributing, where applicable, prepackaged communion or sacraments
- Places of worship shall not have communal gathering pre or post service (e.g., coffee hours or other food services)
- Places of worship may allow small gatherings (such as support group meetings) to be held with 25 persons or fewer
- Places of worship running food pantries or other prepackaged food distribution may continue to do so

#### **V. Nurseries and Childcare**

- Any childcare services should follow the latest EEC child-care guidance, available on the [EEC Reopening Site](#)

#### **VI. Cleaning and Disinfecting and Hygiene Protocols**

- Places of worship shall be cleaned and disinfected between each service, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments)
- In event of a positive case, follow current [CDC guidance](#) on cleaning and disinfecting areas when someone has a COVID-19 diagnosis.
- Places of worship shall ensure that attendees and workers have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water, and allow workers sufficient break time to wash hands, as necessary. They are also encouraged to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol available, if possible

**VII. Notification of Positive Case**

- If a Place of worship learns that an attendee or worker or other worker has tested positive for COVID-19, it shall notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the place of worship is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to advise likely contacts to isolate and self-quarantine