



MAHONING COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

PREVENT · PROMOTE · PROTECT

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Interim Guidance for Churches and Faith-based Organizations

The following guidance is provided by Mahoning County Public Health (MCPH), in combination with the Ohio Department of Health, to local leaders of the faith-based community for best practices to ensure the protection of their membership and the communities of Mahoning County. MCPH is recommending that the guidance be considered. Guidance may be subject to change based on evolving directives from the State of Ohio and the Ohio Department of Health.

Universal Protective Measure for Funerals/Weddings/Church Services include:

- Clean and sanitize the facility and all high touch-point surfaces, such as door handles, between services.
- Prop doors open, if possible, to reduce contact with common touch-points.
- Ensure the minimum of six-foot distance between families and/or individuals.
- Promote hand washing and proper hygiene education/reminders.
- Provide hand sanitizer or other hand washing supplies.
- Encourage individuals to conduct a self-assessment of their health (anyone with a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher should not attend a service).
- Utilize social media to broadcast services to encourage at-risk members to stay at home. This will also help those who are afraid to go out to still participate in the service.
- Face masks, face coverings, or face shields should be worn to protect others.
- All physical contact should be prohibited (handshakes, hugs, etc.).

Recommended Best Practices and Modifications include:

- Outdoor services, when weather allows, would be the preferred way to provide services to help ensure that individuals are maintaining a six-foot distance between others. Indoor services are permissible and additional steps should be considered to ensure that safe distancing can be achieved.
- Have ministry groups meet in groups of 10 or less or in spaces that can accommodate social distancing.
- Services may be conducted in parking lots where members can remain in their cars and cars can be spaced out.
- Services can be conducted in different areas of the building for those that have multiple rooms and/or wings within their facility. Churches may consider conducting live or streaming sermons with maintaining groups of ten or less placed in separate rooms throughout the facility.
- Consider and utilize alternative methods of administering church offerings, baptisms, and the Lord's Supper that do not require physical contact.



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- Restrict the number of individuals to 50% of the maximum as determined by the fire code. You may want to utilize known pew/chair space and determine how many families and members can safely distance themselves for count at each service.
- Families should enter, sit, stand, and exit as a group. No one should wander away from their family group.
- Provide ushers to help facilitate social distancing for seating.
- Conduct additional services to reduce the number of people at each service.
- Individuals with chronic diseases or age 55 or older should be encouraged to stay at home and to join via social media, if available.
- Dismissal should be controlled and attendees should be instructed to exit row by row to ensure no unnecessary crowding or congregating at the exits. If possible, have one way to enter and exit to avoid contact.
- Maintain a log of attendees to help facilitate COVID-19 contact tracing should an individual be identified as COVID-19 positive and/or other exposure.
- Encourage families and members to avoid parking next to each other and to leave quickly after services to avoid large gatherings in the parking lot.
- Forgo hard copy distribution of church bulletins to limit hand-to-hand exposure.
- Discontinue nurseries, Sunday School, Children's Church or bus ministries at this time.
- Consider suspending any required or suggested donations, offerings, dues, or other payments, especially from members who are out of work due to the pandemic. Offer mobile or online payment options.

As the current Stay Safe Ohio directive evolves of the next year, MCPH recommends that you follow the Universal Protective Measures for Funerals/Weddings/Church Services that are stated above. We believe that following these measures will ensure you to do the best job possible in keeping your families and membership safe and healthy.

Churches and faith-based organizations are encouraged to develop a plan for review by MCPH, but these plans are not subject to approval by MCPH. These recommendations are only to guide you in the right direction.

Further questions can be addressed by contacting our office at 330-270-2855.