

Guidance for Faith-Based Communities

APRIL 14, 2020

For faith communities throughout the state, this has been a time of great change and adaptation. Social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19 deeply affects the shared rituals, social events, community meals, and support services provided by faith communities. In faith communities, it is particularly difficult to follow the directive to stay at home. This guidance document is meant to reinforce and encourage actions you have already taken and need to continue through holidays and special services in our diverse faith traditions.

Stay connected to your faith community

The comfort and support of our faith communities is more important than ever. Keeping the traditions, prayers, and hope that faith communities provide helps us get through this time of great stress and uncertainty. Below are some ideas for staying connected to your faith community.

- Participate in worship services and spiritual practices that are offered online or on the radio.
- Contact your faith leader or members of your faith community if you have a faith-related concern or need to talk.
- Give and receive support through talking to people on the phone or through video chats.
- Offer to regularly connect with community members through phone, text, or email.
- Make video chats or phone calls instead of home visits.
- Reach out to neighbors and faith community members, especially elderly or more isolated people, to offer to drop off groceries or other supplies they may need.
- Connect with committees or groups that plan special services for holidays to discuss creative ways to make those events special and meaningful during this season.

Special events in your faith community

Weddings, anniversaries, and other festive events

Postpone these events if possible, or offer an online or virtual event.

If you cannot postpone or offer a virtual event:

- Limit the number of people in attendance to under 10 and make sure there is space for households to stay at least 6 feet apart from one another.
- If anyone involved has COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, etc.), they should not attend.
- Make the event brief.
- Do not serve food or beverages at the event.

Faith traditions

- Ceremonies or rituals that cannot be done virtually or postponed can be adjusted to accommodate the social distancing guidance of less than 10 participants and space for households to stay at least 6 feet apart from one another. Choose options that do not include close contact with anyone who does not live in the same household.
- If eating or drinking is essential for religious reasons (e.g., Communion) in a rare home visit or limited service setting, make sure each person gets their own container and sanitize the containers after every use. The faith leader or representative should hand the recipient the container of items instead of placing them directly in the recipient's hand or mouth.
- Avoid distributing food or beverage items whenever possible.

Funerals

People in all communities are affected by COVID-19. Some people in your faith community will likely become ill and die from this virus. People will also die during this time because of issues not related to COVID-19. Anything you can do now to prepare for this situation, while staying compliant with the Governor's stay at home order, will be helpful to the whole community. Here's what you can do:

- Discuss funeral plans with your faith leaders, family members, and communities now. Discuss how common rituals and practices will need to change in order not to spread the COVID-19 virus to others through a funeral gathering and gatherings leading up to a funeral.
- If cremation is the option of choice, consider postponing a service with the cremated remains of the deceased.
- If your faith tradition requires that the deceased be buried immediately, or cremation is not an option, consider having a burial with as few people present as possible. For those who cannot attend in person, consider having an online or radio option, or hold a funeral service at a later date.

If you cannot postpone or offer a virtual event:

- Keep attendance at funerals and related events to an absolute minimum. Limit the number of people in attendance to under 10 and make sure there is space for households to stay at least 6 feet apart from one another.
- If the body of the deceased is present at the ritual or funeral, avoid touching the body.
- Keep the event as brief as possible.
- Do not serve food or beverages at the event.
- If anyone involved has COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, etc.), they should not attend.

If you are a faith leader and want to discuss how these recommendations could be incorporated into your faith's practices, contact the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) at health.communications@state.mn.us; include "Funeral Recommendations" in the email title and briefly describe your questions. MDH will follow up with you.

Provide Community Support Services and Opportunities

- Work with local radio and media outlets to provide information about remote support and faith activities.
- Use mailers and newsletters to ensure all community members receive information.
- Post COVID-19 successes on your social media pages. For example, children washing hands while singing for 20 seconds or volunteers delivering groceries.
- Provide opportunities for community members to participate in letter writing, phone calls, and digital connections.
- Organize food support activities for members of the congregation in need of those services, as you are able.
- Organize prayer chains for community members.
- Offer phone call check-ins with community members to provide accurate and current information about COVID-19. Some people may have questions or just need to talk to someone, but an emergency or hotline service is not necessary.

Food distribution

If your faith community already provides food support activities, consider the following strategies to practice social distancing while continuing this service:

- If anyone involved has COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, etc.), they should not participate.
- Provide gloves and masks for people making and packing food. Homemade masks are a good option for this activity.
- Provide markers at least 6 feet apart for people making, packing, and distributing food so distance is easily maintained between people.
- Provide drive-through pickup or outdoor pickup points.

General Things You Can Do

- Follow the stay at home order.
- Keep 6 feet between yourself and others when you:
 - Go to the grocery store.
 - Go to medical appointments and the pharmacy.
 - Get take-out, delivery, or drive-through from nearby restaurants.
 - Go outside.
 - Pick up and drop off essentials for neighbors or loved ones in need of assistance.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough.

You should not

- Go to work unless you provide an essential service.
- Socialize or gather in groups.
- Visit loved ones in the hospital or nursing home, except under limited circumstances.

Resources

Contact your faith community leaders. They may have resources for you.

- **CDC: Coronavirus (COVID-19)** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>)
 - Website in Chinese (simplified), Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese
 - Sign-ups for weekly COVID-19 newsletter
 - **CDC: Communication Resources** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>)
 - Guidance in multilingual print and videos
- **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)** (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/>)
 - Website in Hmong, Somali and Spanish
 - Sign-ups for COVID-19 updates
 - **Materials and Resources for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Response** (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html>)
 - Glossary of terms, infographic of social distancing at work, and door sign for businesses to prevent COVID-19 spread
 - Multilingual fact sheets, handwashing videos and PSAs (includes ASL)
- **MN Governor's Office: COVID-19 Response and Preparation** (<https://mn.gov/governor/covid-19/>)
 - Sign-ups for email updates
 - **#StayHomeMN Frequently Asked Questions** (<https://mn.gov/governor/covid-19/faq/>)
 - **#StayHomeMN media materials** (<https://mn.gov/governor/covid-19/media/>)
 - Multilingual social media, print materials, and videos
 - Amharic, Hmong, Karen, Oromo, Russian, Somali, and Spanish
- **Mental Health**
 - **Psychological First Aid** (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/behavioral/index.html#aid>)

- Coping Mechanisms: Health care responders, parents/caregivers, teens, kids, and families
- Disaster planning and suicide prevention
- [Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting From COVID-19](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19)
(<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>)
 - Available in Amharic, Bahasa, Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese
- **Hotlines**
 - *MDH - Schools and child care* (1-800-657-3504), 7AM-7PM (Monday-Friday)
 - Interpreters available; just say “Need interpreter for *name language*”
 - *MDH - Health questions* (1-800-657-3903), 7AM-7PM (7 days a week)
 - Interpreters available; just say “Need interpreter for *name language*”
 - *DLI - Unemployment insurance* (1-877-898-9090), 8AM-4:30PM (Monday-Friday) or [Minnesota Unemployment Insurance Program \(uimn.org\)](http://uimn.org) to enroll.
 - Press 1 (English), 2 (Spanish), 3 (Hmong), 4 (Somali)
 - TTY for deaf and hard of hearing: 1-866-814-1252

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.