

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Large Gathering Guidance

King County is seeing an increased number of cases of novel coronavirus and the situation is changing daily. As a faith leader, you can take steps to help mitigate and contain the spread. Faith-based organizations serve multiple functions in society. It is important to weigh competing needs and risks of those during this COVID-19 outbreak. For many people, congregations are the one place they find community, love, and acceptance. They serve a vital mental health benefit. At the same time, it is important that this outbreak be taken seriously without giving in to panic.

Events or large gatherings, such as religious gatherings, create environments where a virus can spread quickly among workers and attendees. Depending on the situation in your area, you may need to modify, postpone, or cancel your gathering. Public Health – Seattle & King County acknowledges the economic and social/emotional consequences of canceling gatherings. At this time, we are recommending you consider canceling or postponing large gatherings (such as those with more than 50 people).

You have a religious gathering coming up. Questions to consider:

The following questions are intended to help you decide whether to cancel your gathering. If you are unable to address the items below, please strongly consider rescheduling and canceling gatherings.

- What does our King County Health Officer recommend?
 - At this time, we are recommending canceling large gatherings.
- At your gathering, is a large portion of attendees or staff from vulnerable groups who are already being asked to not attend any large gatherings?
 - Vulnerable groups include anyone over 60 years old, those who are immune-compromised, those with underlying chronic health conditions, or those who are pregnant
- Is your gathering located in an area that illness is spreading between people in the community and it is unclear who might be contagious? Are many people coming from these impacted areas?
 - Due to the risk to staff and attendees, consider canceling or rescheduling your gathering if this is the case.
- Can you provide for the safety of attendees and staff?
 - Do you have enough hygiene stations for handwashing?
 - Can you allow the recommended 6 feet of distance between attendees? If not, can how much personal space can you assure?
 - Communion and other interpersonal practices that include sharing food, beverage cups/utensils, or other objects increases the chance of virus spread.
 - Baptisms using tap water do not pose a greater risk.

- Outdoor venues have better air circulation and permit more distance between people than indoor environments.
 - Do you have processes in place to ensure sick attendees are not present?
- Will you have enough staff to operate your event?
 - Is a high volume of your staff out sick?
 - Do you have access to surge staffing or have you developed surge staffing plans?
 - Are you able to communicate accurate information about COVID-19 to your staff prior to the event?
- Are there alternatives to holding the event?
 - Web-based attendance, televised only (no audience), other remote attendance options, reschedule the event

If the event is permitted to continue, consider the following steps:

1. Develop a communication plan for sharing information about the event and risks of attendance with staff and attendees. (See below for guidance.)
2. Consider flexible attendance and sick leave policies for staff. Plan for alternative coverage of job duties as needed. (Alert the local health department if there are large increases in absenteeism due to sickness.)

Communicate with event staff and attendees prior to the event.

- Encourage those in higher-risk groups not to attend your event. **People over 60, those who are immune-compromised, and/or those with underlying chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of having serious complications from novel coronavirus.**
- Encourage people to remain home if they are sick. Inform staff about sick leave policies and/or the ability to work from home, if possible.
- Provide a brief description of the current status of COVID-19 in your area. (www.kingcounty.gov/coronavirus for the latest information.)
- People should take the following precautions to prevent possible transmission before, during, and after the event:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Cough and sneeze into the elbow or into a tissue. Throw away the tissue immediately after use and wash hands.
 - Practice social distancing. Keep as much distance between people, ideally maintain a distance of six feet or more. Refrain from hugs and handshakes.
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often and at least twice per day.
- Give staff and attendees clear information about venue and process changes that will help slow the spread of illness such as:
 - Training on how to address obviously ill attendees, such as respectfully asking them to leave the facility.

- Setting up barriers between staff and attendees. For example, placing tables or other barriers between staff and attendees to keep a six-foot distance. If that isn't possible, staff should stand to the side of traffic flow.
- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers in your communications. Information should be easy to understand and accessible to all attendees. www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html.

Protect attendees and reduce spread by building virus prevention measures into your event planning.

- Identify strategies to increase space or limit contact between attendees during a pandemic. For example, modify seating arrangements to increase space between attendees, find a larger venue, stagger multiple smaller gatherings, and discourage attendees from crowding around bathrooms and food stations.
- Plan ways to care for attendees and staff who get sick during an event and to separate them from attendees and staff who are well.
- Communion and other interpersonal practices often include shared food and beverage cups/utensils which increases the chance of virus spread. Consider suspending practices that increase interpersonal contact (such as communion) or creating alternate practices that reduce personal contact.
- Increase the number of hygiene stations and have supplies on hand such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (if available), tissues, and trash baskets.
- Explore alternative site design and set-up, such as:
 - Prop doors open to avoid touching (May need to consider additional security.)
 - Increase ventilation within the facility
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as handrails and countertops with disinfectant cleaners often during the event. Items like prayer rugs and tallit's are not practical to clean often, but should not be shared to reduce virus spread.
- Post signs and make announcements sharing how attendees can protect themselves and others. Consider posting signs at entrances and in bathrooms.
 - [PHSKC Coronavirus Factsheet](#)
 - [Coronavirus and Stigma](#) and [Viruses Don't Discriminate](#)
 - [Slow the Spread of Germs Poster](#) CDC (pdf)
 - [Spanish Version](#) CDC (pdf)
 - [CDC Handwashing Posters](#)

If you have specific questions, please contact:

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