

GUIDELINES FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

It is known that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to others by infected persons who have few or no symptoms. Even if an infected person is only mildly ill, the people they spread it to may become seriously ill or even die, especially if they are 65 or older, or have pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease that place them at higher risk. Because of the hidden nature of this threat, everyone should rigorously follow the practices specified in these protocols, all of which help facilitate a safe and measured reopening of Alabama.

In addition to guidelines on COVID-19 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the following are the minimum recommended health practices for all churches, congregations, and places of worship in Alabama. Churches, congregations, and places of worship may adopt additional protocols consistent with their specific needs and circumstances to help protect the health and safety of all employees, volunteers and congregants. The same minimum recommended health practices apply to funeral services, burials and memorials.

Health protocols for employees and volunteers:

- **Allow employees and volunteers to work from home as much as possible.**
- **Screen employees and volunteers for symptoms before coming into facilities with the following questions:**
 - o Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
 - o Are you experiencing a cough, shortness of breath or sore throat?
 - o Have you had a fever in the last 48 hours?
 - o Have you experienced new loss of taste or smell?
 - o Have you experienced vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours?
- **Screen employees and volunteers for fever:**
 - o Best practice: Take people's temperatures onsite with a no-touch thermometer each day upon arrival.
 - o Minimum practice: People take their own temperatures before arriving. Normal temperature should not exceed 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Direct any employee or volunteer who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms** (answers yes to any of the screening questions or who is running a fever) to leave the premises immediately and seek medical care or COVID-19 testing or both.
- **Increase hygiene practices:** wash hands frequently, avoid touching your face, practice good etiquette when coughing or sneezing.
- **Consider having employees, volunteers and attendees wear cloth face coverings** over the nose and mouth to help protect against the spread of the virus (not an N-95 or medical mask, which should be reserved for healthcare workers).
- **Practice recommended social distancing**, at least six feet between people of different households, to the greatest extent possible.

Health protocols for facilities:

- Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs and restroom items.
- Disinfect seats between services.
- Discontinue passing of items among attendees and disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees.
- Discontinue self-service by guests at drink stations, buffets or salad bars.
- Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available.
- Discontinue self-service for snacks or coffee.
- Maintain rigorous sanitation practices like disinfection, handwashing and cleanliness when preparing or serving anything edible.
- **Improve Ventilation:** As basic principles of social distancing, surface cleaning and disinfection, handwashing and other strategies of good hygiene are of the utmost importance in preventing the spread of COVID-19, ventilation in facilities should also be considered.

Consider improving the engineering controls using the building ventilation system. This may include some or all of the following activities:

- o Increase ventilation rates.
- o Increase the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system.
- o Do not recirculate air.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is still circulating in our communities. We should continue to observe practices that protect everyone, including those who are most vulnerable. Please note, public health guidance cannot anticipate every unique situation. Churches, congregations and places of worship should stay informed and take actions based on common sense and wise judgment that will protect health and support economic revitalization.

Health protocols for serving attendees:

- Strongly encourage people 65 or older and others especially at risk to watch or participate in the service remotely.
- Designate an area inside the facility reserved for the at-risk population or offer a service for at-risk population attendees only.
- Ensure proper spacing between attendees:
 - o Keep at least two empty seats (or six feet of separation) between parties in any row, except as follows:
 - Two or more members of the same household can sit next to one another, with two seats (or six feet separation) empty on either side.
 - o Alternate rows between attendees (every other row left empty).