



## GUIDANCE FOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP

This document provides guidance for houses of worship and providers of religious services (HW) to support the safest possible environment for faith leaders, employees, volunteers, scholars, and all other types of workers, as well as congregants, worshippers, and visitors.

All prior guidance applicable to HWs is expressly revoked. Nothing in this guidance expands the mandatory restrictions and obligations in the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration and subsequent modifications. To understand all of the rules applicable to HW, you are strongly encouraged to review the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration and subsequent modifications. As such, this guidance is meant to be a helpful aid both for HWs that choose to expand or resume in-person services as well as for those that do not.

Religious leaders are encouraged to adapt the principles that underpin this guidance to the rites and ceremonies specific to their religion.

This guidance discourages, but does not prohibit, in-person activity at HWs. Consistent with the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration, advice from Delaware Division of Public Health, and recommendations from the Governor's Council of Faith-Based Partnerships, online and drive-in services present the safest option to conduct services. Even with adherence to physical distancing, multiple different households convening in a congregational setting carries a high risk for widespread transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19, and may result in increased rates of infection, hospitalization, and death, especially among more vulnerable populations.

**HWs are required to comply with the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration and any modifications thereto.**

### **The Safest Options: Remote Services and Drive-In Services**

- Remote services can be streamed online, broadcast by radio, and/or conducted by telephone or dial-in. Remote services are the only way to guarantee that HWs will not become sources of new infection.
- Drive-in services pose a lower risk of infection and are strongly encouraged. HWs may conduct drive-in services in accordance with the Twentieth Modification.

## In-Person Services

- In-person services are permitted. The total number of persons permitted in a HW at any one time is limited to sixty percent (60%) of stated fire occupancy requirements. HWs must observe the Responsibilities for all Business set forth in Twenty-First Modification. Strict social distancing, wearing face coverings as required by the Thirteenth Modification, as modified by the Twentieth Modification, and cleaning and disinfecting are paramount to reducing the risk of infection for in-person gatherings.
- HWs are strongly encouraged to remind congregants of social distancing and hygiene requirements (including to stay home if they are experiencing symptoms; utilizing face coverings as required by the Thirteenth Modification; and practicing Minimal Social Distancing Requirement as outlined in the Twenty-First Modification) at the start of any service.
- If weather and facilities permit, it is much safer for worship and other activities to occur outdoors rather than indoors.
- HWs are encouraged to stagger arrival times for congregants, particularly permitting those who need assistance or special seating to enter at a designated time prior to the start of the service.
- Signage and physical indicators (e.g. tape, runners, ropes or ribbon) must be used, where needed, to ensure social distancing rules are followed, with distances measured in six (6) foot increments and marked accordingly at each entrance and throughout the publicly used spaces within the building
  - HWs are encouraged to use ushers or HW staff members to help congregants avoid grouping or congestion by finding places to sit and stand that are at least six (6) feet apart from other guests/household groups.
  - Printable signs that will help HWs comply with the signage requirements are available at: [de.gov/bizsigns](https://de.gov/bizsigns)
- HWs are encouraged to offer additional times for services or meetings so that fewer guests attend at one time.
- HWs are discouraged from sharing items used in worship and services (such as prayer books, cushions, prayer rugs, etc.) whenever possible and provide single use or digital copies or ask congregants/visitors to bring personal items instead.
- HWs are discouraged from passing offering plates and similar items that move between people. HWs are encouraged to collect donations through stationary box, mail, or electronic means.
- During indoor services and gatherings, HWs are strongly encouraged to introduce fresh outside air, for example by opening doors/windows (weather permitting) and operating ventilation systems.
- Children are strongly encouraged to remain in the care of those in their household unit and not interact with children of other parties at any time while visiting a HW. HWs are strongly encouraged to discontinue activities and services for children where physical distancing of at least six (6) feet cannot be maintained.
  - Youth events, education and support groups are recommended to continue through online telecommunication tools as much as possible. Indoor youth programs are encouraged not to exceed fifteen (15) participants per group and must ensure that proper social distancing of six (6) feet is maintained at all times.

## Avoid the Riskiest Activities

- COVID-19 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets in person-to-person contact (within six (6) feet); risk grows as exposure time increases. Some activities at places of worship pose a heightened risk that should be avoided:
  - Strongly consider discontinuing singing, group recitation, and other practices and performances where there is increased likelihood for transmission from contaminated exhaled droplets. Any readers, speakers, or singers must comply with the Thirteenth Modification, as modified by the Twentieth Modification, when addressing a live audience. Strongly consider discontinuing activities where officiants hold a congregant for any purpose.
  - Discourage staff, congregants, and visitors from engaging in handshakes, hugs, and similar greetings that break physical distance.
- Special services, such as baptisms, initiations, weddings, and funerals are permitted, but pose significant health threats if strict social distancing, hygiene and other measures are not taken to decrease the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

## Requirements of the Twenty-First Modification Due to Public Health Concerns

- Minimum Social Distance Requirements must be maintained.
- Face coverings must be worn in accordance with the Thirteenth Modification, as modified by the Twentieth Modification.
- HWs must stagger services to allow a thorough cleaning.
- Microphones cannot be shared.
- HWs must make hand sanitizer or handwashing stations readily available.

**For further guidance, HWs may look to the CDC's  
Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>**

**If you have questions about this guidance, contact the Division of  
Public Health at 1-866-408-1899 or email [DPHCall@delaware.gov](mailto:DPHCall@delaware.gov).**