

Interim Guidance: Considerations for Community- and Faith-Based Organizations, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

March 9, 2020

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed guidance for organizers and staff responsible for community and faith-based organizations (CBFOs) in the United States. As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, the Virginia Department of Health strongly encourages CFBOs to prepare for the possibility of outbreaks in their communities. Creating an emergency plan for your organization can help protect you and your community. The full text of this guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

In addition, while staff and leadership of CFBOs are encouraged to implement some measures articulated in this guidance as part of normal operations or when the likelihood of COVID-19 infection is low, some measures may be more appropriate if COVID-19 infections are reported in Virginia and, further, if infection becomes widespread throughout the Commonwealth.

In consultation with local health officials, leaders **within CBFOs should consider the following intervention strategies based on COVID-19 severity status in Virginia**. Broadly, VDH will assess and categorize COVID-19 severity using measures including the number of cases reported, case- hospitalization ratio and number of localities affected. CBFOs should take into consideration their ability to implement modifications to their normal operations for moderate and high severity level situations depending on the size and scope of their CFBO.

Regularly and proactively communicate with your staff and volunteers to reduce stigma and misinformation; there is no connection between COVID-19 and race, ethnicity, or national origin.

The guidance below is structured in three sections: **prior** to COVID-19 detection in your community, **once** COVID-19 is detected in your community, and **after** COVID-19 event in your community.



PRIOR to COVID-19 Detection in your community

- **Update your existing emergency operations plan**
 - Find out if your local government has a private-public emergency planning group.
 - **Meet with your planning team** to update your emergency operations plan.
 - Consider the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities, and other [at-risk persons](#).
 - Identify services that might be limited or temporarily discontinued during an outbreak.
- Address prevention strategies
 - Promote everyday preventive actions such as **hand hygiene** and **environmental cleaning**, and **provide appropriate supplies** in accessible locations to staff and visitors of your organization.
 - **Plan for staff absences** and develop flexible attendance and sick leave policies. Develop teleworking opportunities for staff when possible.
 - **Identify a separate space** for people who become sick and cannot leave right away.
 - Plan to **limit face-to-face contact** between people in the organizations, including options for telework and telephone conferences. Consider postponing non-essential meetings and travel.
- **Communicate about COVID-19** and prevention actions
 - Identify potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to workers and those you serve.
 - **Share plans** with staff, volunteers, and community partners.



ONCE COVID-19 IS DETECTED in the community (low to high severity)

Once COVID-19 is detected in a community, health department recommendations addressing any change in normal operations will depend on a number of factors such as the number of cases detected, the severity of illness associated with those cases and how widespread infection is or is predicted to be based on case histories. Assessing these and other factors will help the health department determine the severity of the situation, which will help inform recommendations. In consultation with local officials, CFBOs should consider implementing the following when COVID-19 is detected in their or neighboring communities.

- Provide information that explains why and when on-site operations and services may be scaled back, or may be closed to non-essential visitors
- **Distribute health messages** to staff, volunteers, and the community
- **Provide COVID-prevention supplies** to staff, volunteers, and those you serve
 - This includes hand soap and paper towels,
 - Provide [cleaning agents](#) for frequently-touched surfaces, and assign staff to regularly clean surfaces.
- **Educate staff and volunteers** about how to keep themselves healthy
 - **Consider placing posters** about hand hygiene and encouraging people to stay home when sick
- Consider the following **guidance regarding communion and other rituals**
 - **Distribution of ritual breads** (for example, Challah or the host) could be by a single asymptomatic person, rather than each participant individually.
 - If receipt of the host or a blessing may be sufficient, it may be appropriate to limit Communion to one of these during times of community-wide germ spread.
 - If the decision is made by church leadership to use a shared communion cup, we recommend implementing the following safeguards. The chalice bearers should be trained to consistently:
 - **Communion servers should wash their hands** or use hand sanitizer before serving or blessing.
 - Wipe the interior and exterior rim between parishioners
 - Rotate the cloth or purificator during use
 - Use a clean cloth for each service
 - Intinction by parishioners could be temporarily stopped as it increases the risk of germs being introduced into the wine.
 - **Hugging and handshaking** as part of normal fellowship and at the sign/exchange of the Peace could be temporarily stopped. Other options include bowing to each other, waving, or using elbow or foot bumps. Consider other ways to collect offering than passing a plate around that everyone touches, and consider the same for communion.
 - **Shared ritual garments** should be washed after use.
- Consider **cancelling non-essential activities** such as social events, especially for [high-risk groups](#) of people, such as the elderly and those with certain chronic conditions. Consider cancelling fellowship with shared food after services, especially if many people will be touching the same coffee servers, condiment containers, etc.



AFTER a COVID-19 event in your community

Once concern about COVID-19 has subsided, CFBOs are encouraged to work with local officials to help scale back prevention efforts specific to COVID-19. Recommendations to consider include:

- Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for your venues to discuss and note lessons learned.
- Maintain and expand your planning team.
- Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.