



COVID Guidance for Parish Catechetical Programs February 14, 2022

Masks

The Massachusetts State mask mandate for schools will be eliminated as of February 28, 2022.

As a result, parish catechetical programs will no longer need to require masks, effective February 28, 2022. This applies to students of all ages, teachers and staff regardless of vaccination status.

The exception to this is those individuals who have tested positive and are returning to in person programs for days 6-10 of their COVID recovery, as per DESE-DPH protocol.

Individuals who would like to continue wearing masks, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, should be supported and allowed to do so.

Given a parish community's situation, a pastor can decide that participants in their catechetical program should continue wearing masks. However, this would be a decision left to the local parish's discretion and enforcement.

Parish catechetical programs should follow any mandates set forth by local health boards.

Exposure or Exhibiting Symptoms

Individuals should be reminded that anyone who is sick should not attend in person.

Efforts should be made to pastorally accommodate those who are sick, symptomatic, at-risk, or who care for someone who is at-risk. To this end, having a secondary option, such as at-home or online formation options/resources is helpful.

At this time, neither contact tracing nor symptom checks of individuals are required.

However, maintaining accurate attendance is helpful in the event that you are contacted by the DPH due to a close contact case. If this occurs and you need assistance, catechetical leaders can email dcarvalho@dioc-fr.org.

Please visit the CDC's website for information on COVID symptoms, close contact, and guidance on isolating due to either: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Communication and Program Changes

Catechetical programs should always ensure that they have up to date and ready means of communication with families.

Parishes may be faced with postponing in-person programs for different reasons. This may especially be true if there are not an adequate number of catechists/volunteers to safely staff programs due to illness.

In the event this occurs, whether for a portion of the program or its entirety, the decision to do so is left to the individual parish with the approval of the local pastor.

It may be especially helpful to consult with relevant colleagues and stakeholders in this decision-making process, at the very least to ensure that they are informed of decisions.

Virtual Sessions

If parishes choose to utilize virtual meeting platforms to gather with minors (such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Google Meet), parishes should follow the following guidelines:

- It is important to remember that all interactions, whether in-person or virtual, must adhere to the Diocesan Code of Conduct.
- Parental consent should be obtained with clear communication about the way students will engage in ministry, whether sessions are recorded for security purposes, and if recordings can be accessed by students not in attendance. Participants should be made aware that they are being recorded.
- Recordings must be managed by the faith formation staff and not publicly posted.
- The Rule of Two is still the best practice, whether in-person or virtual.
- Links to join virtual sessions should not be publicly posted, but rather sent to registered individuals.
- Utilize the security features available on the platform you use, such as password, waiting room, and turning off share screen and private chat for participants.
- Leaders should review virtual meeting etiquette with all students, including being aware of background when on video and remaining on mute when not speaking.
- Screenshots of the class or participants should not be taken or shared.

For Safe Environment questions, including on virtual protocol, please contact:

Carolyn Shipp – cshipp@dioc-fr.org

For employee or personnel related questions, please contact:

Jennifer Oliveira – joliveira@dioc-fr.org

For all other catechetical or ministerial questions, you can contact:

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