



*May 20, 2021*  
[corona@rcab.org](mailto:corona@rcab.org)

The following guidance is from the Pandemic Response Team:

**Given the new State of Massachusetts protocols that go into place on May 29, the following guidance is issued for the parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston**

**General guidelines**

- As of May 29, 2021, vaccinated people are no longer required to wear masks or socially distance in our parishes.
- This statement applies to worship and other parish activities, but not to schools and not to the office space. Further guidelines will be issued for those two areas.
- Parishes and pastors will not be policing the population. Every parishioner and every family will be expected to make a sound, reasonable decision about when they are ready to take off their masks and be near other people. No pastor and no parish will be expected to ask people whether or not they have been vaccinated.
- The pastor has a high degree of discretion in the implementation of all of these changes. Some pastors may make changes quickly, and others may make them slowly. Pastors are encouraged to engage parish leadership in a conversation about how best to make the changes in their respective parishes.
- There is no longer a distinct set of protocols for parishes in red zones.

**Regarding communication**

- All parishes must publish something like the following statement: "As of May 29, masks are no longer required for vaccinated people in the State of Massachusetts. The State does advise that non-vaccinated people continue to wear masks." The statement should be published in bulletins and on web sites, and announced at Mass.

- All parishes should strongly consider communicating the following points clearly to their parishioners.
  - The dispensation from the obligation for coming to Sunday Mass has not yet been lifted, and even when it is, if a parishioner is feeling ill they should remain at home.
  - It is understood that different people will be ready to take off their masks and sit near one another at different times.
  - Parishes should communicate that they are prepared to accommodate those who are ready to take off their masks and sit near others, and those who are not.
  - Some people who are comfortable dropping social distancing may not yet be comfortable taking off their masks. It should be communicated to people that they are free to continue to wear masks as long as they like, and that they will be respected if they choose to do so.
- When a parish becomes aware that a COVID positive person has attended Mass, there should be some kind of general announcement at least on the parish's website. Parishioners should be advised to keep an eye on the website, as that will be where such an announcement will be made.

### **Regarding the setup of churches**

- Parishes should continue to make provisions for people who are not vaccinated and/or who are not yet ready come to sit near other people.
  - Perhaps this can be done by offering or continuing to offer outdoor Masses.
  - Perhaps this can be done by offering Masses at particular times for those who want to maintain social distancing.
  - Perhaps this can be done by cordoning off portions of the church, in a respectful way, for socially distanced seating. If this is the option chosen, every pew can be used in the non-distanced section of the church, and markings adjusted accordingly.
- Respectful signs in the church should make clear how different sections of the church are being used.
- It is no longer necessary to regularly disinfect surfaces. Some pastors may decide to continue to do so for a time, but it is not required.
- Missalettes and hymnals may be used, and kept in the pews. Parishes may want to engage in significant conversation about whether and how they want to do this. The Office of Worship will make some recommendations and resources available on their website.

### **Regarding the celebration of the Mass**

- Pastors should strongly consider continuing to stream their Masses.
- Registration for Masses is no longer required, although pastors may desire it to continue for a period while they adjust the seating in their churches.
- Congregational singing is allowed, as are choirs. Pastors may use their discretion with regard to masks for their choirs.
- Deacons can play their full liturgical roles: reading the gospel, preaching when appropriate, preparing the altar, the elevation of the chalice, and assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion.

- Altar servers may be used.
  - In scheduling children as altar servers, a pastor may want to schedule members of the same family for a given Mass.
  - It should be clearly communicated to parents that children may wear masks while altar serving.
  - It is likely that a retraining of altar servers, both children and adults, will be necessary.
- Liturgical ministers, such as Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist can be used.
  - A retraining of these volunteers may be necessary.
  - Parishes may wish to use this as an opportunity to reach out to new volunteers to fill these roles.
- A collection may be taken up by using a basket, preferably with a pole, since some people may still feel uncomfortable touching a basket that many other people have just touched, and may feel that they have no option if the basket is handed to them. This reluctance may end up hurting the parish offertory.
- Pastors are encouraged to slow play a return to a shaking of hands at the Sign of Peace. It may well be that not everyone is ready for that, even if they are unmasked and sitting near one another. Other forms for the Sign of Peace could be used.
- The deacon should be allowed to receive the Precious Blood, but the pastor may exercise his discretion in the matter of the deacon using a separate chalice, or intinction, or sharing the celebrant's chalice. Consideration should be given to the health and vaccination status of both priest and deacon in that decision.
- Priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should still disinfect their hands before distributing Holy Communion.
- Priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are strongly encouraged to continue to wear masks during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- The bottle of hand sanitizer should be kept close at hand in case someone receives communion on the tongue. Pastors may exercise their discretion in this matter.
- Communion under both species is still not allowed at this time. A clear communication will go out to parishes when this practice may resume.

#### **Regarding Pastoral Care**

- Communion calls may resume normally, though it may be necessary or wise to retrain the ministers of Holy Communion in how to be effective and respectful of people's concerns in this ministry.
- Nursing home visits and Masses may resume, although it remains necessary to be completely respectful of the protocols of the facility being visited, or hosting the Mass.
- Services in funeral homes, conducted by priests, deacons, and pastoral associates may resume, at the discretion of the pastor.
- The use of confessionals may resume.

## **Regarding other parish activities**

- Not every parish is going to be able to restart everything at once. A priority should be given to the liturgy, and then to pastoral care, and then to other activities such as faith formation and youth ministry, and finally to parish social activities.
- Food and drink may be served at parish activities.
- Pastors continue to have discretion over the use of the parish facilities by outside groups. Pastors continue to have responsibility to be sure the parish space is being used safely.
- Since masking and social distancing are still required in public schools in Massachusetts even after May 29, we are not yet certain about what faith formation programs for children will need to look like in the fall. The programs will certainly be allowed and in person, but we do not know yet about masking and distancing requirements. We will keep you advised.
- Out of state and international parish service trips should still be treated with an abundance of caution, as every state has their own policies and COVID continues to rage in many parts of the world.

## **Final Points**

- There are many heroes among our volunteers that have kept our parishes going during these difficult times. They should be acknowledged and thanked, collectively and personally.
- This document is not intended to be comprehensive. There will be many questions that arise, that will be addressed in the coming weeks.
- There will be a webinar on Wednesday, May 26, at 3:00PM to discuss these questions. Go to <http://bostoncatholic.org/webinars> to register.
- Questions may be directed to [corona@rcab.org](mailto:corona@rcab.org)