

UPDATED COVID GUIDANCE

First, we want to thank you for all you have done the past year to keep your community as safe as possible. We know it hasn't been easy.

As our Conference COVID Response Team has reviewed the most recent guidance from the health authorities, we are encouraged that we are nearing the end of this COVID race. There's only a small stretch to the finish line. You have likely heard the CDC's updated guidance, which has implications in both Oregon and Washington. While application of this guidance varies between our two states, we endeavor to provide possible transitional protocols moving forward.

While mask guidance is changing, we all should still be encouraging our members to continue basic infection-reducing behavior:

- Stay home if you are feeling ill.
- Maintain diligent hand-washing and/or sanitizing.
- Wear a mask when you feel you need too.

The next steps our churches take may have significant implications for the unity of the body of Christ in the local church. As we move into a safer stage, it is important that persons not be shamed for wearing or not wearing a face covering. At this point, a person's choice to wear or not wear a face covering, or to be vaccinated or not be vaccinated, in neither case should be treated as symbol of virtue. It is possible that some vaccinated individuals may continue to wear face coverings because of other health concerns. Our prayer is that persons' choices in this regard will not be judged. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus as our example of how we treat those different than us, always with love and acceptance.

As the Oregon and Washington state guidance or requirements are slightly different, we will relate to them separately.

OREGON STATE GUIDANCE~

The good news is that outside activities no longer require masks or social distancing protocols. This guidance is for everyone, regardless of vaccination status. Masks and social distancing are still recommended for non-vaccinated individuals, but they are no longer required. **This means that churches are now free to plan hikes and other outdoor activities on or off church property.**

For indoor activities Oregon State provides two options:

- 1.) Continue with face-coverings for all guests and attendees at public events, whether vaccinated or not.
- 2.) Fully vaccinated individuals may remain mask-free when providing vaccine verification. No recording of verification is required, however, there must be a written protocol in place that could be produced if asked for by Oregon OSHA. This protocol would be enforced by Oregon OSHA if a complaint of infraction were filed by someone who attended your church or activity.

We find the idea of vaccine verification to be a significant challenge to our church community. Our concern is that in many situations, formal or informal vaccination inquiries could create an environment that is uncomfortable to many of our members.

This why we are recommending that in most cases, churches don't engage in vaccine verification. Instead, we recommend a **more careful approach of maintaining masks for all attendees until the state or your county reaches the threshold when 70% of eligible vaccine candidates have been vaccinated.** With progress being made throughout Oregon, we expect this 70% threshold will be met soon.

For platform program participants, all those who are vaccinated may lead out without wearing face coverings. Communication is much more effective when a presenter is not wearing a face covering while leading out.

WASHINGTON STATE GUIDANCE~

Face coverings and physical distancing are no longer required for vaccinated individuals indoors or any individuals in outdoor settings. Offsite hikes and other outdoor activities are permitted.

Washington State does not require vaccination status be verified. They are going with the honor system. Because of this, we ask that you and your congregation honor this guidance.

Some churches may choose a more careful approach (as outlined in the Oregon section above) to minimize conflict or informal vaccine inquiries by concerned members.

Washington has stated that they expect most, if not all, COVID-safety guidance to expire by June 30.

FOR EVERYONE—RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES~

Be careful and respectful of fellow members' right to privacy regarding vaccination status and minimizing the possibility of division and hard feelings that any inquiries may cause.

Share factual information about COVID-19 vaccinations. We are happy to provide information from our medical institutions regarding vaccine options and refer individuals to vaccine administration locations. Be mindful that the choice regarding receiving or not receiving a vaccine is a personal and private decision, and all persons are to be treated with compassion and respect.

We recognize that this pandemic has brought unforeseen challenges to your church board and leadership team. Since the pandemic began, we know that church boards have followed varied approaches to the guidance. We appeal to you to prioritize the unity of the body of Christ and maintaining respect for every person.

Remember this is still a transition period. The finish line is in sight. Soon, much of the COVID safety guidance will be unnecessary. We just need to hold on for a little longer.

Thank you for your continued support of the state guidance in your area as we move into the home stretch.