

Religious and Faith-based Organizations

COVID-19 Requirements

Summary of January 11, 2021, update:

- Permits live music and performances so long as individuals wear face coverings and adhere to physical distancing requirements.
- Permits up to one individual at a time to speak during a service without a face covering.
- Permits up to two households to sit as group in Phase 1 outdoor services and Phase 2 indoor and outdoor services.

With continuing reports of COVID-19 outbreaks at spiritual gatherings, the Governor still strongly encourages religious leaders and communities to conduct services remotely. Alternatively, drive-in services are permitted. Counseling services are essential and may be permitted in-person, if remote counseling is not viable.

In addition to remote and drive-in services, religious and faith-based organizations are permitted to conduct the following activities in Phase 1 and 2 of the Governor’s “Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery” Proclamation 20-25.12 (et seq.), provided all requirements in this document are met:

A) Hold indoor services at a place of worship with up to 25% of room (or building) capacity with a recommended maximum of 200 people, whichever is less, so long as six feet of physical distancing can be achieved between households in all directions. Face coverings are required for all participants.

B) Hold outdoor services of unlimited capacity with a recommended maximum of 200, so long as six feet of physical distancing can be achieved between households in all directions. Face coverings are required for all participants.

Religious services conducted outdoor, in the open-air, or in an outdoor structure (temporary or permanent) must comply with the requirements of the Outdoor and Open-air Seating Guidance [here](#).

C) Hold or provide in-home services inside a person’s residence with up to five total individuals (excluding organization staff). Face coverings are required for all participants.

The services covered in these operational guidelines include all worship services, religious study classes, religious ceremonies, and religious holiday celebrations. Religious weddings and funerals are not covered under this document and must follow the guidance in this [memo](#).

Organizations are strongly encouraged to keep a log of attendees at each service or counseling session and to retain that log for at least two weeks. If an outbreak occurs, this information may be critical to help save lives.

Safety and Health Requirements

All employers (including religious and faith-based organizations) have a general obligation to keep a safe and healthy facility in accordance with state and federal law and safety and health rules for a variety of workplace hazards. In addition, they must comply with the following COVID-19 organization-specific safety practices, as outlined in the Governor’s “Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery” Proclamation 20-25.12 (et seq.), and in accordance with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries [General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces](#) and the Washington State Department of Health Workplace and Employer Resources & Recommendations at <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Coronavirus/workplace>.

Religious and faith-based organizations must specifically ensure operations follow the main L&I COVID-19 requirements to protect employees:

- Educate all employees in the language they understand best about coronavirus, how to prevent transmission, and the owner's COVID-19 policies.
- Screen employees for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 at the start of every shift. Make sure sick employees stay home or immediately go home if they feel or appear sick. Cordon off any areas where an employee with probable or confirmed COVID-19 illness worked, touched surfaces, etc., until the area and equipment is cleaned and sanitized. Follow the cleaning guidelines set by the CDC to deep clean and sanitize.
- Maintain a minimum of six feet of physical distance between all persons in all interactions and at all times. When strict physical distancing is not feasible for a specific task, other prevention measures are required, such as use of barriers, minimization of individuals in narrow, enclosed areas and waiting rooms, staggered breaks, and work shift starts.
- Provide (at no cost to employees) and require the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, goggles, face shields and face covering masks as appropriate or required for the work activity being performed. Face coverings must be worn by every employee not working alone at the location unless their exposure dictates a higher level of protection under Department of Labor & Industries safety and health rules and guidance. Face coverings are required to be worn by all during the service except when an individual is addressing the congregation. If there are two or more speakers scheduled to address the congregation during the service, only one speaker at a time may remove their face covering.
 - Exceptions to this requirement for face coverings include when working alone in an office, vehicle, or at a job site; if the individual is deaf or hard of hearing and is communicating with someone who relies on language cues such as facial markers and expression and mouth movements as a part of communication; if the individual has a medical condition or disability that makes wearing a facial covering inappropriate; or when the job has no in-person interaction.
- Refer to [Coronavirus Facial Covering and Mask Requirements](#) for additional details. A facial covering is described in the Department of Health guidance, [Department of Health guidance](#).
- Ensure frequent and adequate hand washing with adequate maintenance of supplies. Use disposable gloves, where safe and applicable, to prevent virus transmission on items that are touched frequently or shared and discard after a single use.
- Establish a housekeeping schedule that includes frequent cleaning and sanitizing with a particular emphasis on commonly touched services.
- Post a sign at the entrance to the organization that says face coverings are required.

A location-specific COVID-19 supervisor shall be designated by the organization at each location (indoor and outdoor) to monitor the health of employees and enforce the COVID-19 safety plan.

An employee may refuse to perform unsafe work, including hazards created by COVID-19. And, it is unlawful for the employer to take adverse action against an employee who has engaged in safety-protected activities under the law if the individual's work refusal meets certain requirements.

Information is available in these publications: [Safety and Health Discrimination in the Workplace brochure](#) and [Spanish Safety and Health Discrimination brochure](#).

Employees who choose to remove themselves from a worksite because they do not believe it is safe to work due to the risk of COVID-19 exposure may have access to certain leave or unemployment benefits.

Employers must provide high-risk individuals covered by Proclamation 20-46, et seq., with their choice of access to available employer-granted accrued leave or unemployment benefits if an alternative work arrangement is not feasible. Other employees may have access to expanded family and medical leave included in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, access to unemployment benefits, or access to other paid time off depending on the circumstances. Additional information is available at [Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\) Resources](#) and [Paid Leave under the Washington Family Care Act and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#).

All religious and faith-based organizations are required to comply with the following COVID-19 organization-specific safety practices:

1. Prior to beginning operations as described in this document, all religious and faith-based organizations are required to develop for each location (indoor and outdoor if applicable) a comprehensive COVID-19 exposure control, mitigation and recovery plan. The plan must include policies regarding the following control measures: PPE utilization; on-location physical distancing; hygiene; sanitation; symptom monitoring; incident reporting; location disinfection procedures; COVID-19 safety training; exposure response procedures and a post-exposure incident project-wide recovery plan. A copy of the plan must be available at the location for inspection by state and local authorities, but state and local authorities do not preapprove the plan. Failure to meet planning requirements may result in sanctions, including the location being shut down.
2. COVID-19 safety information and requirements, such as CDC, DOH, OSHA posters shall be visibly posted at each location (indoor and outdoor).
3. Face Coverings and Exemptions - All employees, members, and visitors in attendance shall wear face coverings before, during, and after the service (whether indoor or outdoor). Face coverings are required to be worn by all during the service except when an individual is addressing the congregation. If there are two or more speakers addressing the congregation during the service, only one speaker at a time may remove their face covering. If a speaker decides not to wear a face covering, it is recommended that a Plexiglas 3-sided barrier is used during the service. The barrier must be disinfected after every use.

There are exemptions to wearing face covering, so please refer to the [Department of Health's Order on Face Coverings](#).

4. There may be no direct physical contact between servers and members or visitors. Anything to be consumed may not be presented to the members or visitors in a communal container or plate.
5. Live music and performances –
 - a. **Choirs and Congregational Singing:** Choirs with up to 15 singers are permitted to sing indoors during the service so long as each singer maintains 9 feet (12 feet is encouraged) of physical distancing and wears a three-layer surgical mask. For religious organizations without a choir or with a choir of fewer than 15 singers, congregants and staff are permitted to sing so long as the total number of people singing does not exceed 15 and all those singing adhere to the 9 feet (12 feet is encouraged) of physical distancing and three-layer surgical masking requirements.
Choirs in excess of 15 individuals and the entire congregation are permitted to sing outdoors provided that all singers maintain 9 feet (12 feet is encouraged) of physical distancing and wear a three-layer surgical mask.
 - b. **Soloist singers** are permitted to sing during the service without a mask provided that the individual maintains 15 feet of physical distancing.

- c. **The performance of woodwind and brass instruments** is permitted during the service so long as the performer(s) maintain 9 feet (12 feet is encouraged) of physical distancing and use bell covers. Woodwind and brass performers are permitted to remove their masks during their performance.
 - d. **Musical ensembles and other disciplines of performing arts** are permitted to perform during the service so long as all of the discipline-specific requirements outlined in the [“Theater and Performing Arts”](#) guidance document are followed.
6. All services must provide access to restrooms. Individuals waiting to use the restroom must maintain at least 6 feet of distance between each person.
 7. Soap and running water shall be abundantly provided at locations for frequent handwashing. Employees should be encouraged to leave their workstations to wash their hands regularly, and required to do so before and after going to the bathroom, before and after eating and after coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol should also be provided and used, but are not a replacement for the water requirement.
 8. Disinfectants must be available to employees, members, and visitors throughout the location (indoor and outdoor) and ensure cleaning supplies are frequently replenished.
 9. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces after each use—including personal work stations, mirrors, chairs, headrests and armrests, doorknobs, handrails, restrooms and breakrooms—using soapy water, followed by the appropriate disinfectants. If these areas cannot be cleaned and disinfected frequently, the organization shall be shut down until such measures can be achieved and maintained.
 10. All organizations must adhere to physical distancing requirements and have six feet of space between workstations or have physical barriers between them.
 11. All organizations must adhere to physical distancing requirements and have six feet of space in all directions between the congregation’s seats, pews, and benches or have physical barriers between them. Members of the same household may be seated together as a single unit. This may require the organization to reconfigure the congregation’s seats, pews, and benches or have physical barriers between them. The organization must place markings on the floors and seats indicating a six feet radius to help guide members and visitors.

In Phase 1 for outdoor services and Phase 2 for indoor and outdoor services, up to two households may be grouped together.

12. Brief physical contact may be permitted among a limited number of people (up to 5 individuals) if it is a critical component to the organization’s religious service so long as face coverings are worn and hands are sanitized immediately before and after the contact.
13. Increase ventilation rates where feasible.
14. Ensure that tissues and trashcans are placed throughout the location (indoor and outdoor).
15. Inform all employees, members, and guests that they must self-screen for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 before arriving at the location.
 - Request employees, members, and visitors to take their temperature before attending a service. Any individual with a temperature of 100.4°F will not be permitted to attend the service or attend work at the organization.
 - Any individual with a household member who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or with symptoms of COVID-19 (including a fever above 100.4°F) may not attend the service or attend work at the organization.

16. For in-home services, religious and faith-based organizations are permitted to convene up to five individuals excluding organization staff. These individuals do not need to be from the same household. However, individuals must wear face coverings when individuals from outside of the household participate.

All issues regarding worker safety and health are subject to enforcement action under L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

- Employers can request COVID-19 [prevention advice and help](#) from DOSH.
- Employee workplace safety and health complaints may be submitted to the DOSH Call Center: (1-800-423-7233) or via e-mail to adag235@lni.wa.gov.
- General questions about how to comply with the agreement practices can be submitted to the state's Business Response Center at <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/how-you-can-help/covid-19-business-and-worker-inquiries>.
- All other violations related to Proclamation 20-25, et seq., can be submitted at <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/report-safe-start-violation>.