



Recommendations for Resuming Church Activities

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The United States Federal Government has recommended a 3-phase approach to reopening facilities and resuming activities. These phases are based on 14-day benchmarks for COVID-19 symptoms and cases. (Visit www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica for more information.)

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship offers the following recommendations and considerations for churches and ministries in each phase, based on guidance, insight and consultation from public health organizations and medical experts. Schedules and plans for moving from one phase to the next should be made in consultation with local and regional public health officials.



Physical Distancing

(From www.cdc.gov)

- Stay at least 6 feet from other people.
- Do not gather in groups.
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

(From www.cdc.gov)

- Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, such as tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets and faucets.
- Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant.

Risk and Comorbidity

(From www.cdc.gov)

- Everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19.
- Older adults may be at higher risk for more severe illness.
- People with serious medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, hypertension and cancer may be at higher risk for more severe illness.



PHASE 1

In Phase 1, churches may operate under strict physical distancing protocols, but vulnerable individuals and their families should continue to shelter in place. Individuals should wear masks. Groups of more than 10 people are not recommended.

As churches take initial steps to resume some meetings, there will likely be higher levels of anxiety, curiosity and excitement. Communicating new information and protocols clearly, often and in different formats will be essential. Visual and spoken reminders about wearing masks, hand-washing, physical distancing and the dangers of infection, especially to vulnerable members of the community, are advisable.



Worship

Virtual worship practices should continue throughout Phase 1.



Pastoral care

Churches should continue to engage by phone, email and videoconference with at-risk, homebound and isolated populations. Funerals or visitations with fewer than 10 in attendance may be conducted with strict social distancing in place. Pastoral care and counseling appointments may resume, provided physical distancing is maintained.



Meetings and Gatherings

Very small gatherings are possible, but churches should open facilities to small groups and meetings only if safety protocols, including strict physical distancing, can be maintained. As facilities reopen, churches should limit entry to fewer than 10 people.



Volunteers and staffing

Some staff meetings may be possible with physical distancing in place. Volunteer engagement should be limited.



Hospitality

Clear signage and phone/email messaging about Phase 1 procedures will be needed. Churches should implement strict procedures for disinfecting and distancing, particularly in high-traffic and high-touch areas.



Children

Virtual initiatives and programming should continue.



PHASE 2

In Phase 2, churches should observe moderate physical distancing protocols, but vulnerable individuals and their families should continue to shelter in place. Groups should be limited to 50 people or less and those gathering are still encouraged to wear masks.

Phase 2 may bring a sense of relief to many, so church leaders should offer reminders that the Coronavirus has not been eliminated. For some churches, small group gatherings, programs and ministries may resume, but physical distancing adjustments should be carefully considered and implemented. Vulnerable individuals should not participate. Special attention should be given to health-compromised, homebound and senior adult members, who continue to shelter in place; their sense of isolation may increase as many others return to church.



Worship

A return to corporate worship is possible in small groups. Churches should eliminate the need to touch surfaces or objects such as offering plates or hymnals. Virtual worship practices should continue to be made available to vulnerable members and their families.



Pastoral care

Churches should pay special attention to supporting health-compromised, homebound and isolated families through phone, email and videoconference contacts. Churches may hold funerals or visitations with fewer than 50 in attendance, but physical distancing plans will be necessary. Some individuals may struggle with anxiety about resuming in-person gatherings.



Meetings and Gatherings

With strict precautions, many churches will be able to resume meeting in small groups, such as Bible studies and committees. Churches should plan for differing levels of tolerance for the risks associated with group gatherings. Choir rehearsals present a higher risk and should be postponed. Vulnerable individuals or family members should not meet.



Volunteers and staffing

Observing physical distancing protocols, staff members may return to work. Volunteers should be allowed to resume appropriate service and activities.



Hospitality

As larger groups return to facilities, churches should promote physical distancing with clear signage and messaging. Hospitality plans should include measures to minimize touching of doorknobs, door openers and other surfaces. Hand-sanitizing stations should be readily available throughout the facilities.



Children

Limited children's activities may resume, but special attention should be given to physical distancing, hand-washing and disinfecting protocols. High-risk children and adults should not participate.



PHASE 3

In Phase 3, churches should observe limited physical distancing protocols, but vulnerable individuals and their families should limit public interactions.

As sheltering in place relaxes during Phase 3, many churches will resume pre-outbreak patterns and schedules. However, disinfecting and physical distancing practices should remain in place, especially for vulnerable individuals returning to church gatherings. Churches should account for varying levels of tolerance with the risks of larger gatherings.



Worship

Corporate worship may resume but should continue to follow physical distancing practices.



Pastoral care

Churches should watch for signs of deferred health issues, addiction, abuse or residual stress.



Meetings and Gatherings

Group meetings, such as Bible studies and committees, may resume with few exceptions. Physical distancing is advised. Choir rehearsals and performances present a higher risk, so strict physical distancing should be practiced when choirs resume.



Volunteers and staffing

As larger groups become more common, additional training in new procedures and protocols may be required for volunteers.



Hospitality

Hand-sanitizing stations and cleaning of high-touch surfaces and objects should remain in place. Common areas will require special attention and signage regarding physical distancing.



Children

Many activities and programs may resume with protections in place for physical distancing and disinfecting. Strict precautions for vulnerable children and volunteers should be maintained.