



Modified Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies During COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Updated July 21, 2020

Alameda County has issued [guidance for places of worship](#) to continue religious services and cultural ceremonies in a modified capacity. This document provides responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) that have been raised in discussions about reopening.

***Effective July 15, 2020: Due to increasing rates of new cases and hospitalization, Alameda County was placed on the State's COVID-19 Monitoring List. Until further notice, indoor worship is not permitted. Please keep this in mind when considering plans to resume services/ceremonies will be impacted.**

1. Why does the Places of Worship Guidance include a “recommended” number of people allowed to attend services and ceremonies? *

The risk for COVID-19 transmission increases with the number of people in a group. The Health Officer recommended that services/ceremonies only allow 25 or fewer people in attendance. While places of worship can allow the lesser of 100 people or 25% facility capacity to attend services, it is safer to keep the group as small as possible.

2. Do places of worship need to submit the COVID-19 Site-Specific Protection Plan to the County for approval?

Places of worship and other organizations that are permitted to reopen according to a released Health Officer Order do not need approval of their Site-Specific Protection Plans from the County in order to operate. If places of worship would like the County to review any aspect of their reopening plans, the COVID Recovery Team is happy to provide technical assistance and can be reached by email at COVIDrecovery@acgov.org.

3. Is hosting religious services outdoors that much different than hosting services indoors when maintaining social distancing and face covering precautions?

Gathering in person is risky in either setting. However, convening outdoors is better than indoors because it allows for open air flow and decreases the potential risk of transmitting aerosols between individuals and households.



- 4. Our church has different buildings for different purposes (for instance, an infant/toddler building, a children's building, and a youth building). Are we permitted to apply the 25% rule to all buildings? For example, our auditorium seats 600, so it could host 100. Our youth building holds 200, so it could host 50. ***

Yes, the current Shelter in Place Order (20-14a) allows you to apply the "25% or 100, whichever is less" rule to religious services/cultural ceremonies being held in different buildings.

- 5. Singing is discouraged in State and County guidance. Are there any options or conditions under which places of worship can incorporate singing into their religious services?**

Singing increases the likelihood of disease transmission because contaminated droplets are projected further into the air and space surrounding the singer. This practice would counteract the risk-reduction achieved through physical distancing of six feet. As an alternative, places of worship are encouraged to rely on previously recorded video or audio presentations to enjoy praise/worship songs and other hymnals.

- 6. If we pre-record worship with a small group of singers (2-3) and a camera person following CDC guidelines, is that limited enough to allow for singing?**

The audio should be prepared with singers in separate physical spaces or at least 15 feet apart so that there is no possibility of spreading droplets between the singers through the air. It would also be advisable to wait some time, potentially an hour or more, before people are allowed within the singing area again.

- 7. Can you provide a definition of a Social Bubble, and what is allowed versus not allowed within Alameda County?**

A social bubble is group of 12 people maximum that is stable for 3-4 weeks. You should be part of only one social bubble. The bubble should meet outdoors, everyone should wear face coverings, and maintain physical distancing of at least six feet. For further information on Social Bubbles, please see the Alameda County Shelter in Place Order FAQ, pages 8-9: <https://covid-19.acgov.org/covid19-assets/docs/6-19-20%20Alameda%20County%20SIP%20Order%20FAQ%206-23-203%203%20PM.pdf>



8. Are there guidelines for children’s groups (e.g. education classes, faith study groups, etc.) to convene when places of worship reopen?

Children should remain in the care of their household members and separate activities and services for children are not permitted at this time, unless the children and adults participating in the service are part of the same social bubble.

9. Since there are no caskets allowed inside the church would a memorial service still be considered a funeral with a limit of 25 or is it a religious service with an allowable attendance of up to 100 people? *

Places of worship should continue to treat a memorial service as a funeral with a capacity limit of 25 people. Although state and local orders for standard religious services and cultural ceremonies allow for 100 people, the Alameda County Health Officer strongly urges that places use 25 or fewer (i.e. the smallest groups possible) to comfortably serve your congregations for all service types.

Additional Resources:

- CA Industry Guidance for Places of Worship: <https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>
- Alameda County Reopening Guidance for Places of Worship: <http://www.acphd.org/media/593477/health-officer-order-20-14b-places-of-worship-re-opening-guidance-english.pdf>