



COVID-19 REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

UPDATED ON DECEMBER 23, 2020

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

To provide general guidance and best practices for safe reopening. Contact COVIDRecovery@acgov.org if you have questions or require technical assistance. For business resources, visit <https://covid-19.acgov.org/recovery.page>.

NOTE: The [Alameda County Reopening Plan](#) is in alignment with the State's [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#), but there will be areas where Alameda County is more restrictive than the State. The more restrictive guidance prevails.

STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

1. Prepare and implement a [COVID-19 Site-Specific Protection Plan](#) based on local and [State industry specific guidance](#).
2. Train employees on COVID-19 prevention, symptom screening, face coverings, and importance of physical distancing and frequent handwashing.
3. Implement [symptom screening](#) for all employees and do not allow employees who exhibit symptoms to come to work.
4. Develop cleaning and disinfecting protocols.
5. Establish physical distancing guidelines.
6. Ensure compliance with the [Alameda County Face Covering Order](#) by all persons in your place of business (customers, employees, suppliers, etc.).
7. Comply with guidance issued by the [California Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#), all [Local Health Officer Orders](#), and applicable federal, California, and local provisions for paid sick leave for individuals who cannot safely work for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTICES

- Any places of worship that facilitate congregational services under these guidelines are strongly encouraged to continue providing virtual/remote offerings that do not require congregants or visitors to gather in person.
- Outdoor religious services or cultural ceremonies may be facilitated on a first-come, first-served basis. It is strongly recommended that attendance be limited to no more than 100 persons.
 - Physical distancing of six feet must be maintained between individuals and/or households, and congregants must wear face coverings unless exempted from doing so under the Face Covering Order.
- For outdoor services places of worship may setup shade structures to protect from the elements. Please reach out to your local Fire Code authority and your local planning department about restrictions and permits.
- Umbrellas, canopies, and other shade structures must:
 - Be open on three sides to allow for the free flow of air through the space **or**
 - Have two (2) one-half walls or “pony wall” of no more than four (4) feet in height and no more than one (1) solid wall **or**
 - Have two (2) canopy mesh side walls and no more than one (1) solid wall.
- Only certain types of heating devices can be used under tents, canopies, sun shelters or other temporary physical structures. Forced air heaters situated outside the structure or electric heaters within the structure may be suitable options— please contact your local Fire Code authority for more information and any needed approval for use. Per California Fire Code, open flames or other devices emitting flame, fire or heat or any flammable or combustible liquids, gas, charcoal or other cooking device or any other unapproved devices are not permitted inside or located within 20 feet of the tent or membrane structures while open to the public unless approved by the fire code official.
- Wind screen walls that include but are not limited to temporary and movable tall potted plants or temporary and moveable physical structures, must have the ability to stand on their own and be braced for wind load, should be no more than four (4) feet in height.
- ~~• Indoor religious services or cultural ceremonies may be facilitated on a first-come, first-served basis not to exceed 100 persons, or 25% of the facility’s maximum capacity, whichever is less.~~
 - ~~○ Physical distancing of six feet must be maintained between individuals and/or households, and congregants must wear face coverings unless exempted from doing so under the Face Covering Order.~~
 - ~~○ Individual places of worship may establish lower occupancy limits if desired.~~
 - ~~○ The Alameda County Health Officer strongly recommends indoor services be limited to 25 persons or less, if feasible.~~
- Outdoor in-person religious services and cultural ceremonies can involve extended periods of close contact, increasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 at these events. As such, it is recommended that event organizers consider maintaining contact information of attendees at services or ceremonies and that this information be kept by the event’s organizer for at least 21 days after the event.

- Small religious gatherings that bring together stable groups of up to three (3) households, as defined in [Section 6 of the Shelter-in-Place Order](#) with proper precautions including physical distancing, face coverings, and good hand hygiene may be hosted outdoors.
- Provide vehicle-based gatherings with proper precautions including face coverings when windows are open and keeping vehicle passengers within the same household. See [vehicle-based guidance](#).
- Establish protocols for frequent cleaning and disinfection of commonly used surfaces (e.g. pulpits and items on pulpits, microphones, door handles and railings) ~~and high traffic areas such as lobbies, hallways, and chapels.~~
- Discourage use of shared items such as prayer books, hymnals, prayer rugs, offering plates, etc. Alternatively, ensure items are only handled by one individual or household during the service, and placed away for 1-3 days before next use.
 - If available, use technology friendly applications for display of scripture and collection of offerings (e.g. Venmo, CashApp, etc.)
- ~~Utilize tape and/or signage to arrange seating and close off rows in order to guide congregants and visitors to sit at least six feet from each other. Have a staff member or volunteer direct the flow of traffic to organize seating arrangements.~~
- Discontinue food and beverage offerings, particularly those that are self-serve and/or potluck and family-style. Provision of food and beverages is strongly discouraged, but if served utilize single-serve, disposable containers and ensure individuals serving food are physically distant, wash their hands frequently and wear disposable gloves and face coverings.
 - Indoor dining is not permitted.
 - Maintain a list of those preparing or serving food and ensure they have been screened for symptoms.
 - Food, beverages and utensils should be individually packaged, should not be self-serve, and when possible, should be prepared in advance
 - Physical distancing must be maintained while waiting in line. Distance markers, or the use of a volunteer to monitor a line, are encouraged.
- Singing, chanting, and other group recitation activities are discouraged, but allowed with use of face coverings and physical distancing of six feet.
 - The Alameda County Health Officer recommends a minimum of 8 feet distance between all musicians and attendees if no face covering is worn while using wind/brass instruments.
 - Performances (pageants, concerts, etc.) are subject to guidance on [vehicle-based gatherings](#).

RITUAL CEREMONIES (FUNERALS, WEDDINGS, BAPTISMS, BRIS, ETC.) GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTICES

- Consider reducing visitor capacity and/or stagger visitation times for ritual ceremonies.
- For Funeral Guidance, please visit this webpage under the “Industry-Specific Reopening Guidance” section: <https://covid-19.acgov.org/recovery>
- Weddings must be facilitated outdoors. It is strongly recommended that attendance be limited to no more than 100 persons. ~~indoors with up to 100 persons, or 25% of the facility’s maximum capacity, whichever is less.~~ Wedding receptions/parties (food and beverage) are not permitted at this time.
 - Physical distancing of six feet and face coverings must be maintained.
- Recommend spiritual communion only, as providing communion directly is a high-risk activity. For those places of worship that choose to conduct communion/sacrament rituals, it is advised that this ritual be held for the end of service. Ensure all are wearing face coverings and use hand sanitizer between individuals receiving communion.
- Congregants should be baptized in their own clothing to refrain from using baptism gowns which may be shared. Baptistry workers should wear protective equipment (e.g. gloves, eyewear, face coverings) and those being baptized should wear face coverings and maintain physical distancing. Baptistry water should be tested and disinfected on a regular basis. Food and beverage not allowed.
- Catholic Mass recommend the priest celebrant or minister remains more than six feet from the congregation during the entirety of Mass to forego mask and gloves while ministering. Modify processions and placement of other personnel to ensure safe physical distancing of at least six feet.
- In preparation for prayer services, ablution/wudu (the rinsing of one’s hands, mouth, nose, etc.) should be performed at home, if feasible.

CHILDREN & YOUTH SERVICES

- Households are encouraged to attend services as a family unit, with children remaining with their parents or guardians through the duration of service.
- Places of worship should discontinue activities and services for children where physical distancing of at least six feet cannot be maintained.
- Where children/youth are participating in religious services as their Childcare or Youth Extracurricular (CYE) Activity Unit, they should remain in a stable group of 14 or fewer participants (plus up to two adult facilitators) for at least 3 weeks. Limit of two (2) CYE Activity Units outside of the household.