

Community Organizations & Communities of Faith: Recovery Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic



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WORKING TOGETHER AND STAYING INFORMED

As the outbreak of COVID-19 evolves in the United States and around the globe, communities are joining forces to social distance and play our parts in defeating this global health crisis for good. We know that community-based and community-focused organizations, and many communities of faith are doing all they can to maintain safe social distancing practices while continuing to engage with communities. How can we stay both connected and safe during this time?

Healthcare Ready was founded in 2007 after Hurricane Katrina to focus on connecting patients to available healthcare during disasters. Since then, Healthcare Ready (healthcareready.org) has evolved to a nonprofit organization that works to build and enhance the resilience of communities before, during, and after disasters. This toolkit explains how your organization can stay connected to communities while staying safe during this time, especially as you serve your community.

OVERARCHING GUIDANCE TO CONSIDER

Not all COVID-19 risks are created equal. It is important to consider different levels of risk when planning community- and faith-based gatherings for your organization.

The three factors to consider when planning an activity or event for your organization are: 1) location, 2) number of persons, and 3) length of interaction. Even then, there are factors you should consider.

- **LOWEST RISK:** Virtual gatherings.
- **MORE RISK:** Small, outdoor gatherings. Masks are worn by all attendees. Social distancing of at least six feet is enforced. Rigorous cleaning practices are maintained. All attendees reside in the same local geographic area.
- **HIGHER RISK:** Indoor attendance-controlled gatherings. Masks are worn by all attendees. Social distancing of at least six feet is enforced. All attendees reside in a general geographic area with limited to no exceptions.
- **HIGHEST RISK:** Large in-person gatherings. Masks are not worn by attendees. Attendees are not able to social distance at least six feet apart. Many attendees reside in non-local geographic areas.

HEALTHY BEHAVIORS MATTER

Healthy behavior is another important factor to consider when planning gatherings for your organization. Consider these guidelines for you and your team as you serve.

- Always wear masks, and make sure you cover both your nose and mouth.
- Always stay six feet apart from persons who do not live with you and avoid crowds of any kind.
- Avoid gathering within indoor spaces unless they are properly ventilated.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or frequently use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Stay home when you experience sickness symptoms.
- When you feel sick, get tested for COVID-19.
- Receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as current availability allows.



ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

REOPENING AND SCALING UP OPERATIONS

Is it time to begin scaling up your organizations' activities and events? **There are many factors to consider when considering what is the appropriate time to reopen an organization and resume operations. Many of these are internal factors such as an organization's ability to ensure the safety of staff, guests and others.** If you feel it is time, be sure to keep the following in mind and practice:

- Maintain communications with [state](#) and local health officials and authorities for local guidance.
- Provide protections and participation alternatives for persons with the highest risk of COVID-19 complications, including older persons and persons with underlying health conditions.
- Put policies in place that protect the privacy of high-risk persons regarding their underlying medical conditions which may include diabetes, respiratory illnesses, cancer, etc.
- Encourage or require organizations sharing your facilities to follow these same guidelines.
- If your organization provides social services, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information on [schools](#) and [workplaces](#).
- Remember that resuming normal operations should be a gradual process and that, if appropriate, virtual meeting options can continue to be incorporated into your business practices to ensure the comfort and safety of staff and those you serve.

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Cleaning and sanitation are always important for communal gathering spaces, but it goes without saying that a global health crisis presents a particular emphasis on them. Make sure to keep these good practices in place when [planning a gathering for your organization](#):

- Clean and disinfect surfaces daily such as door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains, grab bars and hand railings. For more information on good cleaning and disinfection practices, head to the [CDC's page on this](#).
- Clean and disinfect shared objects between each use such as microphones, office equipment and payment devices.
- Create a schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfection.
- Limit the number of people who can use the restroom at once to maintain social distancing.
- Clean and disinfect restrooms multiple times a day, particularly high-touch surfaces like faucets, toilets, doorknobs and light switches.
- Keep restrooms constantly stocked with handwashing supplies.
- Keep gathering spaces ventilated by opening a window or door.
- Arrange gathering space seating options to maintain social distancing of at least six feet.
- If food is offered at any event, consider pre-packaged options, and avoid buffet or family-style meals if possible.



MAINTAINING HEALTHY OPERATIONS

Having a plan and sticking to it, while useful, is not enough to adequately maintain healthy operations.

ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS:

- Always stay up to date on local and state regulatory agency policies related to group gatherings to affirm it is safe to hold your organizational gathering as planned. Your [state](#) and local health departments can provide guidance.
- Consider participating with local authorities and other community groups to engage in COVID-19 response efforts.
- Define decision-making protocols to stay adaptable to the quickly changing public health landscape, including a communication plan and information-sharing system.
- Designate one staff person responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns, and make sure all staff and attendees know who they are, how to contact them, and when to contact them. (Situations include receiving a positive test for COVID-19, experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, coming in contact with a COVID-19 infected person within the last 14 days).
- Implement flexible sick leave policy for staff. Prepare for flexible sick leave by coordinating a roster of back-up staff and volunteers.
- Conduct a virtual safety protocol training for staff and regular volunteers.
- Limit sharing of gathering spaces with other groups/organizations as much as possible.
- Promote healthy habits among staff and volunteers such as eating healthy, exercising, getting adequate sleep, and using time to unwind. A strong and healthy immune system is even more important to fight the pandemic.

GATHERING OPERATIONS:

- As mentioned earlier, do not forget to protect the privacy of and make accommodations for high-risk persons (such as offering options for virtual attendance).
- Reorganize gathering spaces to maintain social distancing of at least six feet, and prioritize outdoor gathering spaces as often as possible.
- Group staff, volunteers and attendees into small groups that limit their contact with other groups.
- Stagger gathering arrival times to maintain social distancing.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to avoid public transportation when possible. If this is not possible, direct them to the [CDC's page on protecting yourself when using public transportation](#).
- Maintain a supply of masks for persons to wear if necessary and make sure masks cover both the mouth and nose.
- Perform daily health checks in the form of temperature screenings and/or symptom checks.
- Instruct staff and volunteers to wash their hands regularly for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Always have staff and volunteers clean their hands before, during, and after food preparation; before eating food; after using the restroom; after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing; after coming in contact with a frequently touched surface; after putting on, removing, or touching a mask.
- Persons should avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.



SIGNS AND MESSAGING

In times of crisis, exceptional communication is essential. Make sure all staff, volunteers, and attendees are informed at all times by posting signs in highly visible locations such as entrances, restrooms and gathering halls. Signs can include information on [general health protective measures](#), [how to stop the spread of germs](#), [how to properly handwash](#), and [how to properly wear a mask](#).

Include messages such as [videos](#) about preventing the spread of COVID-19 in emails, community websites, and social media channels. Head to the [CDC's communication resources page](#) for more print and digital messaging your organization can utilize.

PLAN FOR WHEN SOMEONE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION BECOMES SICK

- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes [sick](#) at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
- Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) external icon](#) or other applicable laws and in accordance with religious practices.
- Advise those with [exposure](#) to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to [stay home and self-monitor](#) for symptoms, and follow [CDC guidance](#) if symptoms develop.
- Close off areas used by the [sick](#) person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection. Ensure [safe and correct application](#) of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Advise staff and congregants with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met [CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation](#). Also, direct these individuals to resources regarding [treatment and therapeutic options](#) they should further discuss with their healthcare providers. This may include the use of combination monoclonal antibodies or an antiviral like remdesivir depending on timing and severity.
 - Combination monoclonal antibodies are administered via IV infusion shortly after a patient tests COVID-19 positive. If a person has recently tested positive, this option should be discussed with a healthcare provider.

DEVELOPING LONG-TERM PLANS OF ACTION

Having a plan and sticking to it is not the most effective strategy to implement in the midst of a global health crisis. Now is the time for staying informed, practicing exceptional communication, observing attention to details, and implementing adaptable systems to keep organizational gatherings ongoing and safe.

Some long-term actions to consider include:

- Leave at least one door open at all times to increase ventilation and decrease touching by many persons.
- Leave windows open to increase ventilation.
- Remove unnecessary items from common areas to decrease the spread of germs.
- Reduce porous materials used for seating that are susceptible to body excretion retention.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HEALTH RESOURCES

Collaborating with public health entities, like your local county health department, is an effective way of staying informed about what services and healthcare resources are available in your community. Please see below for additional resources that may be helpful as we navigate this next phase of COVID-19.

- Find a COVID-19 vaccine near you by calling 1-800-232-0233, text your zip code to 438829, or visit www.vaccines.gov.
- [Free vaccination locations embeddable map](#): U.S. Digital Response (USDR) has partnered with Vaccinate the States, a collaborative non-profit effort, to expand equity with language translations and help communities find active vaccination locations nearby with a [free embeddable map](#). The embeddable map makes up-to-date information easy to find with a list of active vaccination sites and links to the appointment pages. It is completely free and requires no permission from us. It includes a comprehensive list of health equity clinics, pop-up sites, and other community clinics. Many organizations that use the map report that their communities are safer. See the map in action on the Alameda County public health department website [here](#). Available in English, [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), [French](#), and [Hindi](#) with Mandarin, and German coming soon.
- [The Humanitarian Disaster Institute \(HDI\)](#) has created a dedicated resource page, regularly updated with essential tools, resources, and information, to help churches better prepare for and respond to the coronavirus pandemic and what it may bring in the future. Resources include [Preparing your Church for Coronavirus](#) and the [Coronavirus Church Planning Template](#).
- If you suspect you or someone you know may have COVID-19, use the [Coronavirus Self-Checker](#), a tool to help you make decisions on when to seek testing and appropriate medical care. If you are positive for COVID-19, explore the [treatment options available](#) to you including monoclonal antibodies which should be administered as soon as possible after diagnosis and within 10 days of symptom onset.
- The Disability Information and Access Line (DIAL) connects callers to information about how to access the COVID-19 vaccine and related supports for people with disabilities. DIAL connects callers to vaccine sites and provides information related to barriers to vaccination by referring callers to local and national disability resources. Learn more at www.acl.gov/dial or by calling 888-677-1199 or emailing DIAL@n4a.org.



CONTACT HEALTHCARE READY

Questions about our services and resources, including requests for information, assistance or additional resources can be sent to Healthcare Ready via:

- **Email:**
 - Response-related questions or assistance: Alerts@HealthcareReady.org
 - General outreach to Healthcare Ready: ContactUs@HealthcareReady.org
- **Hotline:** 1-866-247-2694
- Sign up for Healthcare Ready's weekly "Situation Reports" that provide routine overviews on the response and critical information that can help you protect your communities. Request to be added to the email list here: <http://www.healthcareready.org/contact-us>

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