

COVID-19 Guidelines for Gathering
First Mennonite Church
08-03-20

Our lives have been significantly impacted over the past several months by the coronavirus. It has disrupted family and church life, altered the way we do our work and our daily tasks, impacted jobs and the economy, and caused the deaths of many people in our community and around the world. We continue to learn more about the virus itself and about its effects on the health and bodies even of those who recover.

Through this experience, we at First Mennonite continue to seek ways to care for one another, to support and encourage each other in these days of fear and isolation. We long to gather again in person, and we realize perhaps more than ever the power of physical presence. Seeking to balance the risk of spread of the virus and the premium we place on being present, we are committed to gathering in person only when it can be done with minimal risk. In addition, throughout this experience, we seek to provide special care for the vulnerable among us.

One of the significant challenges is the changing realities of numbers of cases, deaths, hospitalizations and what these changes signify about how we might best think about our gatherings. In an effort to follow the best practices advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and our own state and local health officials' guidance,¹ and to provide guidelines for the congregation in our life together, we offer these COVID-19 Guidelines for Gathering. These guidelines follow the alert levels and accompanying distancing guidelines used by the state of Ohio. We have added level 0 as we envision the day when herd immunity or widespread use of a vaccine will allow us to develop practices of a new normal.

It is clear that counties will rise and fall from one alert level to another over time. When moving to a higher level of alert, we will move to those new guiding principles for gathering as soon as possible. However, when moving to a lower level of alert, we will only move to those new guiding principles following two weeks of sustained lower level of alert in our county.

Level 0 Green:

Herd immunity or widespread use of a vaccine is achieved. We will follow new standards of hygiene and sanitization.

Facilities

Facilities will be open. Staff will resume regular office hours.

Worship

Gathering for worship will return to in person, with videos being made available online. Congregational singing resumes during worship.

¹ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system/>

Ministries

Various activities will resume. Music ensembles resume normal practices.

Fellowship

Fellowship in groups and among individuals will resume. Potlucks, food, and refreshments will resume.

Level 1 Yellow

There is active exposure to coronavirus and spread in the county. We will follow all current health orders.

Facilities

Facilities are open to small group gatherings with masks and appropriate degree of caution and physical distancing. Staff may resume limited office hours.

Worship

Worship will be video recorded and offered online. Limited in person options may be available with masks, and appropriate degree of caution and physical distancing. No congregational singing with in person option.

Ministries

Small groups, committees, Sunday school classes, and youth groups may gather inside with masks and appropriate degree of caution and physical distancing.

Fellowship

Small groups and individuals may gather indoors with masks and appropriate degree of caution and physical distancing. No food, potlucks, or refreshments will be shared.

Level 2 Orange

There is increased exposure and spread in the county. We will exercise high degree of caution while following all current health orders.

Facilities

Facilities are open to gatherings of under 10 with masks and high degree of caution. Staff work remotely, accessing the office as needed, wearing masks in shared spaces.

Worship

Online only. Videotaping some elements will take place in the sanctuary with groups of under 10.

Ministries

Small groups of under 10, including committees, Sunday School classes and youth groups, may gather for short periods inside with masks and high degree of caution and physical distancing.

Fellowship

Small groups of under 10 and individuals may gather indoors for short periods with masks and high degree of caution and physical distancing. No food, potlucks or refreshments will be shared.

Level 3 Red

There is very high exposure and spread in the county. We will limit in person activities as much as possible and follow all current health orders.

Facilities

Facilities are closed to in person gatherings. Staff work remotely, accessing office only as needed, wearing masks in shared spaces.

Worship

Online only. Videotaping will take place with under 10 people leading elements in sanctuary with masks and extreme caution.

Ministries

Small groups, committees, Sunday school classes, and youth groups will gather virtually or distancing outside with caution.

Fellowship

Small groups and individuals will gather virtually or distancing outside with caution. No food, potlucks or refreshments will be shared.

Level 4 Purple

There is severe exposure and spread in the county. Only leave home for supplies and services. Follow all current health orders.

Facilities

Facilities are closed. Staff work remotely, accessing office only as needed.

Worship

Worship is online and with videotaping elements independently or off site.

Ministries and Programs

Small groups, committees, Sunday school classes, and youth groups meet virtually only.

Fellowship

Small groups and individuals meet virtually, check in by phone, email, or mail.

These are guidelines based on what we know now. As more information emerges about the virus and as new treatments and vaccines become available, the guidelines may be revised. The task force will review these guidelines in 3 months and make adjustments as deemed necessary. At every level, we are all encouraged to wash and sanitize hands frequently, to cough and sneeze into elbows, and stay home if not feeling 100% well. In addition, we encourage those who are at elevated risk to exercise extreme caution when making choices about participation.

In the event of a diagnosed Covid infection in our church community, we will cooperate with County Health Department protocols.

The Reopening Task Force consists of Rita Dietrich, Theda Good, Monica Harnish, Carrie Mast, Karen McCullough, Mary Pannabecker Steiner, Wanda Stopher, Mark Suderman, and Lois Wetherill. Please direct questions or suggestions to Rita Dietrich.