

COVID-19 & REOPENING HOUSES OF WORSHIP Q&A

San Mateo County
June 6, 2020

INTRODUCTION:

San Mateo County Health is dedicated to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all our residents. We value the critical work that is being provided by our Houses of Worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hope is to come together as a community and support one another along this new path.

On June 3, 2020 San Mateo County (SMC) Health Officer, Dr. Scott Morrow held a webinar for clergy in San Mateo County to answer questions about letter (link below) which provides additional guidance on the revised order allowing "Places of Worship and Businesses to Reopen with Special Consideration to Ensure the Safety of our Community".

- Webinar recording: [Dr. Morrow Clergy Town Hall](#) or <https://youtu.be/SN1qbVQY6wQ>
- [Dr. Morrow's letter to clergy](https://www.smchealth.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/faith_based_letter_20200529.pdf?1592247114): https://www.smchealth.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/faith_based_letter_20200529.pdf?1592247114
- California Department of Public Health's [COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies and Cultural Ceremonies](#)
- [Order No. c19-5e – Appendix C-1\(REVISED\): Additional Businesses Permitted to Operate Effective June 1, 2020 \(Section 6\)](#).
- [Recent health officers statement](https://www.smchealth.org/health-officer-orders-and-statements): <https://www.smchealth.org/health-officer-orders-and-statements>

The Q&A's below are from the inquiries received during the webinar.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS CAN FAITH LEADERS TAKE TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF CONGREGANTS?

- Congregants sign an informed consent that lays out the risk of these type of gatherings and identifies high risk groups who are particularly prone to bad health outcomes. Congregants need to make fully informed decisions about the gatherings you host.
- Obtain a Line List of names and contact information for each participant at each gathering. These lists should be kept for 45 days and can then be destroyed. This list allows for a swifter case investigation and contact tracing and the rapid initiation of appropriate isolation and quarantine of affected congregants, should the need arise. Should the lists need to be used, please note that they are completely confidential and are protected from law enforcement and immigration authorities.
- Though gathering is not recommended, if you do decide to proceed with gatherings, please be aware, that smaller is safer and outdoor services are safer than indoor ones. Attendance is limited to a maximum of 25% of building capacity or 100 individuals, whichever is lower (for both indoor and outdoor gatherings). This limitation on attendance will be reviewed by the State of California at least once every 21 days, beginning May 25, 2020. The State of California has indicated it will assess the impacts of these imposed limits on public health

and provide further direction as part of a phased-in restoration of activities in places of worship. Following any change by the State of California, the Health Officer will consider further changes as well.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE AGE OF 50?

It is especially unsafe for people over the age of 50 and folks who have chronic medical conditions to gather. Data has shown us that the COVID-19 death rate substantially increases at age 50 and above. There is high risk of disease transmission and it is highly recommended that these individuals participate virtually.

ARE SINGING AND CHANTING SAFE?

Singing and chanting, a mainstay of many services, while very comforting and healing, is about the best way you could think of to spread the virus far and wide and infect many. The particular problem is that this creates aerosols that spread far distances. This is not recommended at indoor nor outdoor gatherings.

IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE COMMUNION?

Disease transmission during communion is high due to the amount of opportunities for spread during preparation and giving communion to congregants. It is not recommended that traditional communion practices be followed at this time due to the high risk of handling, providing and congregates having to remove masks to take communion. You can also refer to the [CDC guidelines Interim Guidelines for Communities of Faith](#) and the [California Department of Public Health's COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies](#). This is not a violation of the order, however it is recommended to think of a different way to honor this practice.

IS THE REQUIREMENT FOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP TO TAKE CONGREGANTS TEMPERATURES?

No, this is not a requirement. Some work sites are screening and taking the temperature of individuals prior to entering their place of employment. This is currently not required in Houses of Worship, however can be done if you believe it will provide congregants with a greater sense of safety.

DO YOU BELIEVE WE WILL BE ABLE TO GATHER FOR OUR JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER?

We do not believe that we will be in a significantly different place in September and October. The virus will still be around and any large gathering is not recommended.

IS IT ADVISABLE TO INSTALL PLEXIGLAS AT OUR PODIUM?

Theoretically this decreases the amount of droplets that spread the virus. However, we know that wearing face coverings definitely decreases droplets. Face coverings and maintaining physical distancing recommendations are known to protect the community.

IS IT SAFE FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS TO USE THE SAME SHARED SPACES AT DIFFERENT TIMES?

Yes, with ensuring that spaces are properly cleaned and that different groups use the spaces after allowing 12 hours to pass. Please refer to [CDC guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfecting](#). Additionally, you could refer to the [CDC FAQs for Administrators and Leaders at Community- and Faith-Based Organizations](#) page.

IF HOUSES OF WORSHIP DECIDE TO STAY CLOSED WHEN WOULD IT BE SAFE TO COMPLETELY REOPEN?

When we have a treatment, vaccine or have achieved herd immunity. Experts do not believe these options will happen for months or even years.

OUR CONGREGATION HAS A CHILD CARE PROGRAM IN THE FALL. WILL WE BE ABLE TO CONTINUE THIS PROGRAM THIS FALL?

It is unclear at this time if this is recommended. We will know more when we have clarity on what are schools are going to do in the fall and when we are closer to this time.

HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED TO REVISE THE CURRENT ORDER?

We reviewed our county data and hospitalizations. Hospitalizations are the best indicators we have, however they are 3 to 4 weeks behind and therefore considered late indicators. Looking at R nought, a mathematical term that indicates how contagious an infectious disease is, we want this number below 1. Therefore, for every infection we would see less than one new infection. During SMC initial Shelter in Place order our R nought was .9. Since loosening restrictions SMC R Naught is now 1.3. Our community has to work to do everything right now to decrease this number and avoid an exponential growth phase. We are using the data to inform our decisions.

DO YOU LOOK AT OUR NEIGHBORING COUNTIES DATA AS SO MANY RESIDENCE CROSS COUNTY LINES DAILY?

Yes, the Health Officers of our neighboring counties are in daily contact. Currently our R naught (refer to previous questions) is the highest in the Bay Area. However, our county loosened restrictions 2 weeks prior to other neighboring counties. We are continuously monitoring these numbers and working together to ensure the safety of all our residents.

WHAT DO WE DO IF SOMEONE AT OUR GATHERING TESTS COVID-19 POSITIVE?

If all wear face coverings, maintain a 6 foot physical distance, keep list of congregates in attendance and follow recommendations the risk of spread is decreased. When an individual tests positive our Public Health Department will complete an investigation

to learn if others are at risk. If the investigation deems that others are at risk they will be contacted, tested, quarantined and monitored for 14 days.

WHERE CAN INDIVIDUALS GO TO GET TESTED?

It is recommended that you contact your health care provider and follow their directives on where and how to get tested. Additionally, VERILY Testing is available. This is a state sponsored testing contractor, supported by County's as to location and logistics with usually 24 hour turnaround time and is available to asymptomatic individuals as well.

VERILY TESTING REQUIREMENTS: Register online and get appointment ([verily.com](https://www.verily.com)).

Must have gmail account and phone number. Additionally one needs ID or the ability to prove identity on the day of test.

Verily Testing Schedule and Locations: Site Definitions -

SMEC (Event Center); HMB (Half Moon Bay); DC (Daly City); EPA (East Palo Alto); and NFO (North Fair Oaks).

Site Addresses:

NFO- Sports House Parking Lot, 3151 Edison Way, Redwood City

DC- Jefferson High School District, 699 Serramonte Blvd, Daly City, CA 94015

HMB- Cunha Intermediate School, 600 Church St., Half Moon Bay

EPA- 550 Bell St, East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Schedule: (there are no times listed because this is by appointment (drive up with accommodation for pedestrians and bicycles):

6/1/20 - 6/13/20

M - SMEC Tu - SMEC W - HMB Th - HMB F - NFO Sa - NFO

6/15/20 - 6/26/20

M - SMEC Tu - DC W - DC Th - EPA F - EPA

6/29/20 - 7/10/20

M - SMEC Tu - HMB W - HMB Th - NFO F - NFO

SHOULD ALL FAITH LEADERS HAVE A COVID-19 TEST PRIOR TO OPENING?

We do have guidelines for this process in work setting with individuals who have a lot of contact with the public. However, we have not had this discussion in regards to Houses of Worship. If this becomes a recommendations this information will be disseminated.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE DISSEMINATION OF ACCURATE INFORMATION?

You each play an important role in getting accurate information out to our communities. To begin with, explain to your congregation why you are making the decisions you are making. You can also explain why Dr. Morrow is making the decisions he has made. You can also encourage your members to find information on COVID-19 at our [SMC County Manager Office COVID-19 Resources](#) page or our [San Mateo County Health COVID-19 data](#) page. Additionally, community members can always refer to our [California Department of Public Health COVID-19](#) page and the [CDC COVID-19](#) page. The CDC website is kept up to date with the most recent information and they have guidelines by topic with the most current information.

SHOULD WE KEEP OUR MISSALETTES IN THE PEWS?

No. Anything that is touched by multiple individuals should be removed. Please refer to [COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies and Cultural Ceremonies](#).

HOW CAN I BECOME MORE INVOLVED WITH LOCAL FAITH BASED EFFORTS?

- Learn about our San Mateo County [Office of Diversity and Equity](#) (ODE) that is dedicated to creatively bringing discussions of inequities, disparities, and injustice front and center in our work. We invite you to visit our page, read our [ODE blog](#) and/or get on our [ODE Mailing list](#).
- Join one of our San Mateo County [Health Equity Initiatives](#) (HEI) and attend one of our [9 HEI Monthly meetings](#). Our [Spirituality Initiative](#) collaboratively explore, increase awareness of, and support spirituality and its relationship to health and well-being, especially for those with or at risk of co-occurring alcohol/drug addiction and mental health challenges.
- Become part of the [Peninsula Solidarity Cohort](#), a group of over 40 interfaith clergy and faith leaders working for social justice in our county, please email peninsulasolidarity@ccsm-ucc.org for additional information.

WILL THIS WEBINAR WITH DR. MORROW BE AVAILABLE AFTER TODAY?

Yes, we hope that you have the time to watch the webinar where Dr. Morrow answers our faith leaders questions. Webinar can be found at [Dr. Morrow Clergy Town Hall](#) or <https://youtu.be/SN1qbVQY6wQ>.

IS IT SAFE FOR STAFF TO WORK IN THEIR CHURCH OFFICES (OBSERVING ALL THE PRESCRIBED PROTOCOLS OF DISTANCING ETC)

Yes. There are prescribed safety requirements for office space. You can find this under [CDC Guidelines for Business and Offices](#).

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR OUR CHILDCARE PROGRAMS?

- Please refer to the [CDC Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain, Open Supplemental Guidance](#)
- For additional information you can refer to the [CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again, INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS](#)
- You may also find the [CDC Considerations for Youth and Summer Camps](#) useful.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR OUR OLDER ADULT COMMUNITY?

Please refer to the [CDC Get Your Home Ready Checklist for Older Adults](#). This checklist can be very helpful in keeping our older adults protected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR OFFICES AND CLEANING DURING COVID-19?

- Please refer to the [CDC COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings](#). This document provide support in maintaining a safe and healthy work space
- .For guidance on cleaning and disinfecting please refer to the links provided by the CDC at [Cleaning and Disinfecting Plan, Prepare, and Respond](#)