



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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DATE: August 17, 2021

TO: Pastors/Administrator; Parish Catechetical Leaders; Youth Ministry Coordinators; RCIA Coordinators; Pastoral Life Coordinators; Priests

FROM: Lori Dahlhoff, EdD, Director of Lifelong Faith Formation 

RE: Guidelines for Children and Youth Faith Formation during the pandemic

We encourage you to continue to offer a variety of ways to engage learners and families in the parish, including connecting virtually or providing at-home options as needed. Emphasize participation in Sunday Mass as crucial to effective formation at any age, considering how programming leads to this essential Catholic practice or unintentionally minimizes it.

With the dramatic increase in the number of Covid19 case resulting from the more contagious Delta variant, Maine's Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs will return to using similar protocols to those in place at the end of May 2021. See Appendix One for details. For example, all children, youth, and adults, regardless of vaccination status, are to wear face coverings while inside buildings for children or youth formation activities; all are also to continue completing a Covid19 self-check before coming onsite to participate (See Appendix Two for a sample).

Anticipate following these guidelines through the end of 2021 with the active hope that conditions will improve sooner than that. As the diocese has done throughout the pandemic, conditions and these requirements will be reviewed periodically to ensure that mask-wearing and other restrictions are in place for as short a time as prudent.

The health and safety of our unvaccinated children is a top priority, and these precautions are in place to fulfill that responsibility. Thank you for your understanding. The diocese is grateful for your partnership as we do all we can to provide safe and healthy learning environments for young people and the adults who accompany them.

Please reach out to the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation with questions or for support in planning to begin programs this Fall.

Mary, comforter of the sick, pray for us. St Charles Borromeo, patron of learning, pray for us.

Maine continues to follow the national CDC guidelines for programming/schooling with children and teens. The guidelines retain the multi-layered approach to service and prevention already in use (see Appendix Three). **Anticipate using the revised guidelines throughout the rest 2021 along with other parish guidance, remembering that all pandemic guidelines are subject to change.** As the diocese has done throughout the pandemic, these requirements will be reviewed periodically to ensure that mask-wearing and other restrictions are in place for as short a time as prudent.

- **Self-Check before Participating:** Ask staff, volunteers, and participants – – regardless of vaccination status – to continue using the self-check before coming to a parish program. You can find an updated version [online](#) or in Appendix Two.
- **Face coverings:**
 - **Inside:** Face coverings are required for everyone ages 3 and older while inside parish facilities for programs with children and youth, regardless of vaccination status.
 - **Outside:** Masks are optional. Individuals are not required to wear face coverings while in outdoor public spaces *IF* individuals remain at least 3 feet away from anyone not living in the same household, regardless of vaccination status. Masks are encouraged for all in crowded outdoor activities, especially for those who are unvaccinated.
- **Physical distancing:** *It is optimal to maintain 3 feet between people in different households*
 - **Inside:**
 - Minimize crowded conditions, keeping 3 feet between people from different households
 - Avoid indoor sports or games that involve close physical contact among learners
 - **Outside:**
 - Avoid playing close contact games
 - Choose activities that do not involve close interactions for longer than 15 minutes
- **Food and Drinks:**
 - Eat meals and snacks outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces that allow appropriate physical distance as much as possible
 - Provide means for people to safely wash or sanitize hands before and after eating
 - Utilize individually packaged or served snacks and beverages
 - avoid multiple people taking unpackaged food or drink from a common container
 - minimize the sharing of serving utensils
 - follow safe-serving practices including wearing gloves when plating food or pouring drinks
 - **INDOORS:** Remove face coverings only while eating or drinking, replace masks after finish
- **Shared spaces or materials:**
 - Stagger use of shared spaces, such as dining halls and playgrounds with shared playground equipment to promote physical distancing
 - Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high-touch materials to the extent possible (for example, assign art supplies or other equipment to a single child), or limit use of supplies and equipment to one group of learners at a time and clean between uses

- Clean shared equipment between uses *only* if children were unable to wash or sanitize hands before starting an activity
- If activities are held indoors, bring in as much fresh air into buildings as possible to keep virus particles from concentrating inside. Open windows and doors when possible, use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased
- **Meeting in the Worship Space:** *everyone is strongly encouraged to wear a face covering during Mass indoors, regardless of vaccination status*
 - **Children's Liturgy of the Word *may* resume during weekend Masses using all of the following protocols:**
 - Limit to children aged 3 and older (able to wear face covering safely)
 - Children and adults wear face coverings during entire session
 - Children remain 3 feet apart from each other and from adults
 - Session held in a well-ventilated space
 - No food is provided during the session (eating during Children's Liturgy of the Word is not a good practice at any time since we are modeling an act of worship, not providing a social time)
 - If children/teens will gather in the worship space for Mass or prayer that is only happening as part of a program, follow the appropriate masking and distancing protocols for indoor activities

The following activities are allowed with restrictions:

- Overnight activities *only if* participants from different households sleep in individual rooms or tents, i.e. overnight activities cannot plan to have groups of people from different households sleeping in one enclosed space
- Transporting people outside of one's household *only if* everyone in the vehicle wears face coverings

[Click](#) to download poster or share the link

#CareForSelf&Others #StopTheSpread

Self-Check Before Going To Faith Formation



4 to Go

1 to Stop



Symptoms?

TRUE or FALSE



I do **not** have ANY of the following unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 or higher
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Unexplained body aches.

Covid-19 Contact?



TRUE or FALSE



Within the last 10 days I have **not** had contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with or who may have symptoms associated with COVID-19.

Consider your answer "True" if you are fully vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2.



Face Covering?

TRUE or FALSE



I will wear a face covering whenever inside a building with others.

Travel?



TRUE or FALSE



I have **not** traveled outside of the United States of America in the last seven days.

Consider your answer "True" if you are fully vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2.

IF ALL FOUR STATEMENTS ARE TRUE

you may participate in faith formation while minimizing the risk of exposing others to Covid-19.



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APPENDIX THREE

Example of Multi-layered Approach to Service and Prevention during the Pandemic

Consistent and layered use of multiple prevention strategies can help parishes safely provide in-person activities, protect children, families, and staff, and slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Taking Actions to Lower the Risk of COVID-19 Spread

COVID-19 is mostly [spread through close contact by respiratory droplets](#) released when people talk, sing, breathe, sneeze, or cough. Although less likely, it is possible that people can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own eyes, nose, or mouth. Regardless of the level of community transmission, parish programs should implement multiple prevention strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19. This is critical with the more contagious Delta variant that has shown to be transmissible even by those who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic.

Key prevention strategies include:

- Getting vaccinated when eligible
- Staying home if sick or having [symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- Universal and correct use of [well-fitted masks](#) that cover the nose and mouth; [learners] and staff can use well-fitting [cloth masks](#) with two or more layers of tightly woven, breathable fabric or [disposable masks](#); have a spare as wet masks make it difficult to breathe and might not work
- Physical distancing, including cohorts of consistent small groups
 - All learners, staff, and volunteers should remain at least 3 feet apart at all times
 - Eat meals and snacks outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces while maintaining physical distance as much as possible
 - Have masks on when not eating or drinking, replace masks after finish
 - Avoid playing close-contact or indoor sports
- [Handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes](#)
- Engaging in outdoor activities whenever possible and increasing ventilation for indoor activities
 - If activities are held indoors, bring in as much fresh air into buildings as possible. Bringing fresh, outdoor air into your facility helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. Open windows and doors when possible, use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased
 - Learners, staff, and volunteers should not wear masks when swimming or during other water activities but should stay 3 feet apart
- Cleaning and disinfecting when needed, to maintain healthy facilities
 - Stagger use of shared spaces, such as dining halls and playgrounds with shared playground equipment to promote physical distancing between cohorts of [learners].
 - Clean shared spaces at least once a day or as appropriate to high-traffic use.

Adapted from National CDC's

Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools (August 5, 2021)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs (July 9, 2021)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html>