



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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DATE: June 1, 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: Updates to Diocesan Guidelines for Faith Formation during the Pandemic

We encourage you to continue to offer a variety of ways to engage members of the parish, including connecting virtually as only slightly more than half of Mainers are fully vaccinated at this point. At the same time, we need to take care to communicate that vaccination, while encouraged, is *not* a pre-condition for participating in a faith formation activity.

**Before re-starting any faith formation activity that has not taken place since March 2020, take this natural opportunity to assess the purpose, needed resources, and actual impact of each effort before bringing it back into parish life.** If something wasn't working well before the pandemic started, now may be a good time exercise responsible stewardship by doing something different going forward. OLFF staff is available to help you in the process.

### Programs for Adults

With Maine removing the masking, capacity, and distancing restrictions for adults in public gatherings **parishes may once again offer adult only programs without pandemic restrictions.** Follow other parish guidance regarding food, gathering, etc. Please recognize some adults may continue to choose to wear a face covering and keep distance from those outside their households regardless of vaccination status.

### Programs with Children and Teens

Maine continues to follow the national CDC guidelines for programming/schooling with children and teens. The guidelines [updated May 28, 2021](#) retain the multi-layered approach to service and prevention already in use (see Appendix One). Changes impacting parishes programs with children and youth relate to activities outside and sharing food. **Anticipate using the revised guidelines into Fall 2021 along with other parish guidance, remembering that all pandemic guidelines are subject to change.**

- **Self-Check before Participating:** Ask staff, volunteers, and participants – whether or not they have been fully vaccinated – to continue using the self-check before coming to a parish program. You can find an updated version [online](#) or at the end of this memo (see Appendix Two).

- **Face coverings:** *Since unvaccinated people are encouraged to wear a mask when gathering inside with people from other households, choosing to wear a mask when you know unvaccinated people are present is an act of charity of others and sign of solidarity with the vulnerable among us.*
  - **Inside:** Face coverings are required for everyone over 2 years older while inside parish facilities for programs with children and youth, regardless of vaccination status. Learners and staff should not wear masks when swimming or during other water activities but should stay 6 feet apart.
  - **Outside:** Maine no longer mandates individuals wear face coverings while in outdoor public spaces *IF* individuals remain at least 6 feet away from anyone not living in the same household or learner cohort, regardless of vaccination status.
- **Cohort approach:** Cohorts (or “pods”) are consistent small groups of learners (children/teens) and staff (leaders, catechists) that stay together throughout a program to minimize exposure to other people while participating in parish activities. Cohorting does not replace other prevention measures, including wearing masks.
  - Cohort size is determined by space available for distancing, though generally no more than 20 people total.
  - Cohorts should have the same staff stay with the same group of learners and remain together as much as possible. Limit mixing between cohorts.
  - Learners and staff in the same cohort should continue to always wear masks indoors, except when eating and drinking or swimming.
  - Programs that serve younger and older children should consider creating cohorts with learners who are similar in age.
  - If different leaders must interact with the cohorts, it is best for the learners to stay in one place and the staff move between the groups.
  - Maintain 6 feet distance between cohorts/pods whether inside or outside.
  - In intergenerational programs, keep members of the same household in a cohort when possible.
- **Physical distancing:** *It is optimal to maintain 6 feet between unvaccinated people in different households when indoors unless operating in small group cohorts*
  - **Inside:**
    - Minimize crowded conditions, keeping six between people from different households unless using a cohort approach
    - Cohorts promote physical distancing, indoors and outdoors, in these ways:
      - Maintain at least 3 feet between children or teens within a cohort
      - Keep at least 6 feet between all learners and staff/adults, between cohorts, and between anyone else while eating and drinking, including among people within the same cohort
    - Avoid indoor sports or games that involve close physical contact among learners
  - **Outside:** Maine no longer mandates individuals wear face coverings while in outdoor public spaces *IF* individuals remain at least 6 feet away from anyone not living in the same household or learner cohort, regardless of vaccination status.
    - 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
  - All children/teens and adults should remain at least 6 feet apart from people in other households when eating or drinking, even within a cohort
  - 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 between cohorts of children
  - 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:** *plan to minimize confusion between the guidelines observed by the whole parish for a regularly scheduled Mass and those for a program primarily for children or teens*
  - If an activity only involves a Mass or other liturgy taking place as part of the usual parish schedule, you may follow the current guidance for Eucharist (parents' choice about children/teen masking, no distancing requirements, ..)
  - **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 6 feet 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 still not permitted:**

- Overnight activities where participants from different households sleep in the same enclosed space
- Transporting people outside of one's household

## APPENDIX ONE: Example of Multi-layered Approach to Service and Prevention during the Pandemic

Consistent and layered use of multiple prevention strategies can help [parishes] open safely for 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 fully implement multiple [prevention strategies](#) to slow the spread of COVID-19.

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 cohorting](#)
  - 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
  - all [learners] and staff should remain at least 6 feet apart when eating or drinking
  - 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] and staff should not wear masks when swimming or during other water activities but should stay 6 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 Operating Youth and Summer Camps During COVID-19 (May 28, 2021)*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html>

