



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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DATE: September 8, 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: **Updated Guidelines for Faith Formation during the pandemic**

Greetings on this Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I give thanks to God for the gift of our Blessed Mother and for you and your continual “yes” to bearing Christ to those around you, especially during these challenging times.

The only guidance for programs with adults is to strongly recommend all people wear face coverings while indoors. Utilizing the symptom self-check, physical distancing and food/drink guidance for children/youth programs would also be appropriate protective measures, though are not mandates.

The central guidelines for children and youth programs remain the same with four additions (highlighted in yellow in Appendix One):

1. Since Covid19 transmissions rates remain substantial or high across the state, consider 6 feet as the optimal distance between households for interactions longer than 15 minutes.
2. For sacramental celebrations of Confirmation and first Holy Communion follow the guidance for Mass, strongly recommending all wear face coverings though not requiring them for anyone. If parents are uncomfortable with this, they may choose to delay celebrating until next year.
3. Field trips using buses are not allowed right now due to group travel concerns.
4. Remain aware of local community conditions and contact Shawn Gregory, Georgette Dionne or me to discuss next steps if a local change, like a Covid19 outbreak or exposure.

Also included in this memo are guidelines to help you navigate what to do if you or someone assisting in faith formation has close contact with someone who tests positive for Covid19. This can be found in Appendix Four and provided steps for those who are fully vaccinated as well as those who are unvaccinated or not yet fully vaccinated.

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.

APPENDIX ONE

Fall 2021 Child and Youth Faith Formation Pandemic Guidelines

Updates from August 17 guidelines

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 (**updated Sept 8**).
- **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 6 feet** between people in different households*
 - **Inside:**
 - Minimize crowded conditions, keeping at least 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. Sacramental celebrations for Confirmation and first Holy Communion follow the same guidance as for Sunday Mass (i.e. no mask mandate, though strongly recommended for all)*
 - **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

Field trips that require traveling by bus are not allowed at this time.

Community Awareness and Considerations for Adapting or Suspending In-person Gatherings

Since conditions vary across the state and change quickly, contact Lori Dahlhoff, Shawn Gregory or Georgette Dionne to discuss options and next steps if any of the following conditions develop:

- If local public school attended by children/teens in the parish program closes due to Covid19 outbreak (consider suspending in-person gatherings for that age-group for two weeks)
- If multiple catechists develop Covid19 or need to self-isolate due to exposure (see Appendix Four)
- If an on-site program leader tests positive for Covid19 or has close contact with someone who has Covid19
- If local municipality or regional authority issues requirements regarding masking or other pandemic protocols

[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 chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell
- Muscle or body aches
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Cough • Sore throat
- Headache • Diarrhea

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.

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>

APPENDIX FOUR

COVID 19 Exposure Guidelines from the National and [Maine](#) Centers for Disease Control

Close contact is defined as someone who was within 6 feet, masked or unmasked, for 15 or more cumulative minutes in a 24-hour period.

FULLY VACCINATED and had close contact with a COVID-19 case ([click](#) for quarantine poster from Maine CDC)

- An individual who has completed a COVID-19 vaccination series and is exposed to a COVID-19 case **does not need to quarantine** so long as the exposure is more than 14 days after the individual's completion of the COVID19 vaccine series.
- US CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 be tested 3-5 days after exposure.
- They should **wear a face covering in indoor public settings for 14 days after the exposure or until they receive a negative test result.**
- If you become symptomatic, contact a healthcare provider to be evaluated for testing and stay home while you wait for test results.

UNVACCINATED OR NOT FULLY VACCINATED and had close contact with someone with COVID-19

If you had close contact with a COVID-19 case while they were symptomatic or within 48 hours before their symptoms started (or if asymptomatic, starting 48 hours prior to specimen collection), please follow the quarantine recommendations.

- You should **get tested** immediately upon finding out that you are a close contact **and** 5-7 days after your exposure. You should **quarantine until you get the results from the second test or 10 days**, whichever is longer. If no symptoms after 10 days, you may return to work but continue to check for symptoms for 4 more days.
- If you live in the same household as the COVID case and they are not fully isolated from you, you should remain in quarantine until 10 days *after* the infected person is released from isolation.
- You can leave quarantine once you meet the release from quarantine criteria (see below).

