



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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DATE: March 4, 2022

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: **March 7 Face Coverings Become Optional for Child/Teen Faith Formation**

Starting March 7, the Diocese of Portland will no longer require children, teens, or adults involved in parish faith formation activities to wear face coverings while indoors. The Diocese will also remove the strong recommendation to wear masks at Mass. Other pandemic protocols such as self-checks and distancing should be observed (see Appendix One and Appendix Two). As always, if the number of positive cases surges in a specific town, city, or school, the Diocese could reinstate mitigation measures, including mandatory masking.

In other words, the main change to guidance is that masking will be optional for all involved. A parish may choose to continue requiring face coverings after this date if local conditions indicate this is necessary, for example a local requirement to wear masking indoors. Please notify Lori Dahlhoff if this is the case.

While some welcome this change others may be uncomfortable, even fearful, of being in a group without everyone masking. These strategies may help parents and kids navigate this time:

- **Be a positive example** by explaining why this is an important sign that there are fewer people getting really sick from Covid-19 and most people are safe enough now to see each other's smiling faces when we are at church in person.
- **Explain what has changed and what hasn't.** For example, case numbers are dropping and many people vaccinated so less risk for most; masking is only one way we show care for each other and are still distancing and keeping good hygiene. While the masking rule has changed, the parish still cares about each person and will work with families to provide safe ways to participate in faith formation
- **Listen to kids' fears or anxieties** and consider their feelings in the decision of whether or not to wear a mask during Mass or faith formation.
- **Provide alternatives for families with members who are immunocompromised** just as you have throughout the pandemic

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, pray for us and all families to keep faith as we move toward Lent and Easter.

Winter/Spring 2022 Child & Youth Faith Formation Pandemic Guidelines (as of March 7, 2022)

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 these guidelines through Lent 2022 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 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 **a version to use starting March 7 in Appendix Two.**
- **Face coverings (optional for all starting March 7):**
 - **Inside:** Face coverings are optional while inside parish facilities for programs with children and youth, regardless of vaccination status. This includes Mass and other liturgy-related activities such as Children’s Liturgy of the Word.
 - **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.
- **Physical distancing:** *It is optimal to maintain 6 feet between people in different households*
 - **Inside:**
 - Minimize crowded conditions, keeping at least 3 feet between children from different households and 6 feet between adults 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
 - Avoid multiple people taking unpackaged food or drink from a common container
 - Utilize individually packaged or served snacks and beverages
 - minimize the sharing of serving utensils
 - follow safe-serving practices including wearing gloves when plating food or pouring drinks
- **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

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 with written parental/guardian permission
- Anticipate resuming in-state field trips with teens that require traveling by bus sometime after Easter.

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
- 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

Some possible adaptations to in-person sessions in these situations include:

- Shifting to providing virtual gatherings in place of in-person programs
- Suspending in-person gatherings for the time of remote learning in local schools for that age
- Asking families to attend a particular Sunday Mass then remain afterward for a few announcements or time of prayer together

OLFF staff will provide you with a [step-by-step procedure](#) to follow if there have been a Covid-19 exposure in a program

Poster to use starting March 7

#CareForSelf&Others #GrowingMoreLikeChrist



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

 

I do NOT have to be in isolation or quarantine due to being Covid-19 positive myself or having close contact with someone who has Covid-19.

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

 **Face Covering?**

TRUE or FALSE

 

I know that I may choose to wear a face covering during the program and it is ok that others may choose not to wear one.

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. 

Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland - March 7, 2022