



PRELIMINARY
Best Practices for Gatherings

September 24, 2020

This summary provides local houses of worship and the community with information regarding expected changes to the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order (Health Officer Order C19-07) and related guidance **planned for September 30, 2020**, with additional automatic change to capacity limits that will follow should the State reclassify San Francisco under tier 2 (orange). It is currently anticipated that the State may reclassify San Francisco in the near future but San Francisco does not control and cannot guarantee that reclassification process. The best practices create a risk mitigation baseline that houses of worship must follow. The requirements below are not final and are subject to change until the order is revised and related final guidance is issued, but substantial changes are not expected.

It is possible – and even likely – that case numbers and other indicators will surge during the Fall and cause San Francisco to drop back to the red or even purple tier. The Health Officer will continually monitor all local indicators and will pause or reverse these and other re-opening measures if required to combat the spread of the pandemic in San Francisco.

Understanding Risk:

- Engaging in any gathering that includes individuals who are not part of a single Household increases the probability of transmitting COVID-19. The probability of transmission generally increases when gatherings are held indoors. Accordingly, while it is essential for many people's spiritual and mental health to continue to practice their religious faith or attend cultural ceremonies and while the risks can be reduced by following the best practices required under this Directive, it is strongly recommended that all people avoid gatherings including for religious or cultural services, especially indoors. Instead people are encouraged to use temporary alternatives such as observing services or events live-streamed over the internet whenever possible or participating in small outdoor events of limited duration where they practice physical distancing, wear Face Coverings and take other safety precautions. For best practices related to outdoor gatherings, see Directive 2020-19b found at www.sfdph.org/directives.
- If people wish to participate in an Indoor Religious Gathering, they should consider the risks to themselves and others before doing so and should take all possible steps to mitigate those risks, including those required under this Directive. Any person involved in an Indoor Religious Gathering should read and make themselves familiar with this Directive and related DPH guidance.
- All people are reminded that the risk involved in gathering involves not only personal risk but also an increased risk of community transmission of COVID-19 that may extend far beyond those who participate in a gathering.
- Members of vulnerable populations (those over age 50 or with chronic medical conditions) are encouraged to carefully consider their increased risk of negative health outcomes from exposure to COVID-19 before determining whether to participate in Indoor Religious Gathering. And Houses of Worship are strongly encouraged to prohibit members of vulnerable populations from attending Indoor



Religious Gatherings and to continue supporting options for Participants to participate in services without engaging in in-person attendance.

- Risk increases with frequency, duration and proximity of exposure. People are strongly discouraged from attending more than one Indoor Religious Gathering per week. The more contacts a person has with others, including during Indoor Religious Gatherings, the more they are placing themselves and others at risk of transmitting the virus.
- Before entering the House of Worship all people must be screened for symptoms or close contacts as provided in Section 4.3 below and are prohibited from attending any Indoor Religious Gathering if they feel ill or are experiencing any one of the following symptoms: fever, chills, repeated shaking or shivering, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, feeling unusually weak or fatigued, new loss of taste or smell, muscle pain, headache, runny or congested nose, or diarrhea.
- **Educating Personnel and Participants:**
- Ensure that all Personnel have reviewed and understand the requirements of the Social Distancing Protocol, this Directive, and the Health and Safety Plan.
- Develop and implement a plan to educate Participants or others who may attend Indoor Religious Gatherings about the relevant requirements of the Social Distancing Protocol, this Directive, and the Health and Safety Plan. For example, a House of Worship may inform its congregation through a combination of emails, clear and conspicuous signage, or frequent public announcements.
- Identify dedicated Personnel responsible for implementing all requirements of this Directive at a specific House of Worship. Identify dedicated Personnel to assist Participants in maintaining at least six feet physical distance, wearing Face Coverings, and otherwise complying with this Directive.
- Prepare Personnel to respond to suspected or confirmed positive cases at the House of Worship in accordance with the Social Distancing Protocol. Guidance on responding to positive cases at your House of Worship can be found here under the tab for Businesses and Employers in the Information and Guidance for the Public section: <https://www.sfcdcp.org/infectious-diseases-a-to-z/coronavirus-2019-novel-coronavirus/>.
- **Making Indoor Spaces Safer:**
- If safe and feasible, make non-structural alterations to the physical indoor space to facilitate maximum social distancing (at least six feet of physical distance) between members of different households or living units by, for example, creating physical barriers, moving podiums, identifying dedicated paths of ingress and egress, prohibiting access to lobbies, meeting rooms or other common areas, moving or taping off seating, propping open doors at heavily used entry or exit points, closing every other parking space, and using signage or other indicators to control movement throughout the space and to remind people to avoid touching common surfaces like door handles. In bathrooms, maximize ventilation and minimize crowding and touching of common surfaces by, for example (and only when feasible), keeping doors propped open, closing every other sink, and posting signage establishing a maximum capacity for bathrooms with clearly marked and distanced queueing areas. Mark off space in seating, prayer or counseling areas to assist Participants in maintaining at least six feet of distance from members of other Households. Indicate walking paths between spaces designated for Participants to kneel so that people do not walk where someone may touch their head to the floor.



- Post signage around the House of Worship reminding people to adhere to physical distancing, hygiene, and Face Covering Requirements and to stay at home when they feel ill. Examples of signs can be found at <https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19>.
- Adequate ventilation is critical to reducing the risk of airborne transmission of the virus in indoor settings, and especially settings where people stay in the same room for a prolonged period. Go to <https://www.sfdcp.org/COVID-ventilation> to learn about how to improve airflow and reduce the risk of viral transmission. Make any necessary improvements to the ventilation of the establishment, including:
 - Keeping doors and windows open to increase the flow of outside air to the extent possible and appropriate given weather and air quality conditions.
 - Ensure HVAC systems and air exchangers are serviced and functioning properly. Ensure all air filters are achieving optimal performance and replaced in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.
 - If feasible, increase the percentage of outdoor air circulated through the HVAC system, disable demand-control ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy, and increase natural ventilation by opening outdoor-facing windows and doors when environmental conditions and building requirements allow.
 - Consider installing portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, running the building ventilation system even when unoccupied to maximize ventilation, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
 - If the House of Worship uses pedestal fans or hard mounted fans, adjust the direction of fans to minimize air from fans blowing from one person towards another. If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of possible heat hazards and take steps to mitigate them.
- Discontinue use of high touch water vessels, fonts, fountains, and sinks. When ceremonial or ritualistic use of water is required, use low-touch or single-use alternatives or empty and disinfect vessels before they are used by people from different households or living units. If feasible, consider conducting necessary washing at home or otherwise before arriving at a House of Worship.
- Increase availability of hand sanitizer or hand washing stations around the House of Worship, including at entrances and exits. Ensure that restrooms are adequately stocked with soap and paper towels. Maintain adequate amounts of disinfectant and cleaning supplies, Face Coverings, or other appropriate personal protective equipment for Personnel.
- Develop and implement a plan to frequently clean and disinfect common use areas and surfaces touched by members of more than one Household in accordance with the Social Distancing Protocol.
 - Disinfect all surfaces attendees touch at the gathering, including, but not limited to, seating areas, railings, prayer books and hymnals, ceremonial objects, microphones, podiums, pulpits, music stands, and door surfaces. If pews, chairs, or pillows used for sitting are of a porous material, use and replace disposable or washable coverings between each Participant when possible. Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces within restrooms regularly throughout the working day.



- Where possible, do not clean floors by sweeping or other methods that can disperse pathogens into the air. Vacuum wherever possible using a vacuum with a HEPA filter. Alternately, gently sweep floors and do so when there are as few people in the area as possible. Personnel responsible for sweeping or vacuuming floors must wear a Face Covering at all times while doing so.
- Disinfecting products must be approved for use against COVID-19 on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – approved list available at: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>).
- ***Managing Risk During Indoor Religious Gatherings:***
 - Strictly limit attendance at Indoor Religious Gatherings to 25% of the capacity of the building or 50 people, whichever is fewer. Capacity limits will automatically increase to 25% of the capacity of the building or 100 people, whichever is fewer at the time San Francisco is classified as county risk level tier 2 (orange) under the State of California’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy. Capacity limits include Personnel or other volunteers participating in the Indoor Religious Gathering. The capacity limits apply to discrete rooms or spaces within a House of Worship. For example, if a House of Worship includes a building with a capacity of 400 people, but holds services in a room with an individual capacity of 100 people, the service must be limited to 25 people or fewer (25% of the smaller room’s capacity).
 - Conspicuously post signage stating the maximum capacity of the space and the maximum capacity currently permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order. Consider implementing a reservation system to ensure capacity limits are met. Houses of Worship are strongly encouraged to minimize the number of people engaged in an Indoor Religious Gathering.
 - Encourage Participants to meet with the same group of people at each gathering, particularly if a service meets frequently or requires a minimum number of people to be present.
 - Simultaneous or overlapping Indoor Religious Gatherings are permitted only under the following circumstances: (1) the gatherings must occur in spaces that are completely physically separated from each other either in distinct rooms separated by sealed floor-to-ceiling walls or in separate buildings; (2) each distinct gathering meets all ventilation requirements of this Directive; (3) Participants at one gathering have completely separate avenues of ingress and egress from the House or Worship or, if a common path of ingress or egress must be used, the House of Worship ensures (such as by creating staggered start times for services) that Participants from different gatherings do not enter or exit the House of Worship at the same time; and (4) before hosting any simultaneous or overlapping gatherings, a House of Worship must develop and maintain a written plan detailing compliance with this subsection.
 - Unless otherwise specifically provided in this Directive, strictly follow and enforce all applicable requirements of Health Officer Order C19-07 (the “Stay-Safer-At-Home Order”) and the Face Covering requirements of Health Officer Order C19-12c (the “Face Covering Order”) as they may be amended. Strictly follow and enforce all requirements of this Directive at all times and prohibit all people who fail to comply with this Directive from entering the House of Worship.
 - Screen all Participants and Personnel on a daily basis using the standard screening questions attached to the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order as Appendix A and **Attachments A-1 and A-2** (the “Screening Handouts”). Screening must occur before people enter the House of Worship to attend an Indoor Religious Gathering. A copy of the applicable Screening Handout must be provided to anyone on request, although a poster or other large-format version of the Screening Handouts may be used to review the questions with people



verbally. Any person who answers “yes” to any screening question is at risk of having the SARS-CoV-2 virus, must be prohibited from attending the Indoor Religious Gathering, and should be referred for appropriate support as outlined on the Screening Handouts. Houses of Worship can use the guidance available online at <https://www.sfgcdcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID19-Screening-Questions-UPDATE-05.26.2020.pdf> for determining how best to conduct screening.

- Houses of Worship must be prepared to assist public health authorities in potential contact tracing efforts. Consider maintaining a list of Participants willing to voluntarily provide their name for contact tracing purposes. Any lists should be discarded after three weeks. If a Participant tests positive for COVID-19, the House of Worship must assist the Department of Public Health to identify other Participants who may have been exposed to help prevent further spread of COVID-19.
- Ensure that members of different Households remain at least six feet apart at all times during the Indoor Religious Gathering, except for seniors or people with disabilities who may be seated with their caregiver.
 - Members of different Households may briefly be closer than six feet from a House of Worship’s Personnel if the following conditions are met: (1) After carefully considering all possible alternatives, a Leader determines that a specific ritual or custom requires a Participant be closer than six feet from Personnel, (2) all people involved in the ritual or custom wear Face Coverings at all times they are within six feet of each other, and (3) the duration of the ritual or custom is as short as possible.
- Consistent with the State’s health guidance, singing and chanting activities are not permitted during an Indoor Religious Gathering at this time. Even while wearing a Face Covering, these activities – in particular singing – greatly increase the distribution of contaminated exhalations which increases the potential for broad transmission of the virus.
 - Houses of Worship must not organize an event that encourages Participants to engage in singing, chanting, or shouting or otherwise encourage Participants from doing so during any Indoor Religious Gatherings.
 - If a Leader or Participant is engaged in prolonged speaking such as during a sermon or reading, they must speak at least 12 feet from people who are not part of their Household at all times and must wear a Face Covering at all times unless otherwise provided in this Directive. Leaders and other speakers should not raise their voice and should use microphones or other public address systems whenever feasible.
- Except as specified in this subsection, require that Face Covering be worn at all times by all people – including and in particular while speaking, reciting, or praying – during Indoor Religious Gatherings unless a Participant is exempt from wearing a Face Covering under Section 3.g. or h. of the Face Covering Order.
 - Face Coverings may be removed briefly while eating or drinking;
 - If a Leader determines it is essential to a ritual or ceremony that Face Coverings be removed, a person may briefly remove their Face Covering (1) if they do not speak, recite, chant, shout or sing and maintain at least six feet of distance from others while their face is uncovered; or (2) to speak or recite only if they isolate themselves from all other people such as by speaking inside an enclosed chamber or behind a plastic or glass partition or face shield no more than 12 inches from the mouth of the speaker and greater than 12 feet away from any other person.



- Prohibit sharing of items such as food or drink, reading materials, and religious or spiritual objects among people outside of their Household. If an object is of critical importance and must be shared during an Indoor Religious Gathering, take every precaution after each instance of sharing to clean and sanitize the object and/or the hands of the Participants and Houses of Worship who share the object. If sanitation of an object is not feasible, ensure those touching or handling the object properly wash or sanitize their hands before and after touching the object.
- Discontinue passing offering plates and similar items that move between people. Use alternative giving options such as secure drop boxes that do not require opening/closing and can be cleaned and disinfected. Consider implementing digital systems that allow Participants/visitors to make touch-free offerings.
- Disinfect microphones and stands, music stands, instruments and other items on pulpits and podiums between each use by members of a different Household. Consult equipment manufacturers to determine appropriate disinfection steps, particularly for soft, porous surfaces such as foam mufflers.
- Discontinue activities and services for children where physical distancing of at least six feet cannot be maintained unless otherwise specifically permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order. Unless part of a care arrangement otherwise specifically permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order, children must remain in the care of those in their Household and not interact with children of other households or living units at any time while visiting facilities.
- Keep office space closed except that accessory office space that is physically located within a House of Worship may be used in accordance with Section 11 of Appendix C-1 of the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order and Health Officer Directive 2020-18. Only Leaders and any other Personnel necessary for allowed operations who cannot work remotely can use the accessory office space. Personnel who can work remotely are required to do so.
- All Indoor Religious Gatherings must be scheduled to conclude in no more than two hours. The duration of all gatherings should be limited to the maximum extent possible.
- Houses of Worship must prohibit any gathering or congregating after services are complete. Houses of Worship are encouraged to facilitate organized ingress and egress that minimizes grouping or queueing such as by having those seated in the back row exit the building first at the end of a service.
- Schedule at least 30 minutes between Indoor Religious Gatherings during which Participants may safely exit and clear the area and House of Worship Personnel may adequately clean and sanitize all high touch surfaces and otherwise prepare the space for the next gathering. Houses of Worship may permit Personnel to participate in sequential Indoor Religious Gatherings during a single day but are reminded of the increased potential to transmit the virus from one gathering to another. Personnel participating in sequential Indoor Religious Gatherings must thoroughly wash hands and clean, sanitize, or replace any items or clothing that have come in contact with Participants or different House of Worship Personnel during earlier gatherings.
- Keep other areas of a House of Worship closed unless otherwise expressly permitted to operate under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order. Facilities such as day care centers, schools, kitchens, food service areas, gymnasiums or indoor athletic facilities, and children's play structures and areas are not permitted to operate unless in compliance with the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order and any applicable Health Officer orders or directives.



- This Directive establishes minimum best practices applicable generally to all Houses of Worship. Houses of Worship are encouraged to apply the concepts and spirit of this Directive to modify their rituals in a collective effort to mitigate the risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. Examples include discontinuing kissing of ritual objects, allowing rites to be performed by fewer people, discontinuing the use of a common cup, offering communion in the hand instead of on the tongue, or providing pre-packed communion items on chairs prior to service. Houses of Worship also must implement and enforce any additional or more restrictive guidance regarding religious gatherings provided by the Centers for Disease Control or the California Department of Public Health found at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019_ncov/community/organizations/index.html; and <https://covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>.

Nothing in this Section allows a House of Worship to replace, supplement, or change any restriction in the Stay-Safer-At -Home Order, this Directive, or any local, state, or federal health order or guidance related to COVID-19 with a less restrictive measure. For clarity, all Houses of Worship must strictly implement every measure in this Directive and should only supplement new or different safety measures to the extent they are more restrictive (i.e., more protective of public health) than any local, state, or federal health order or guidance related to COVID-19