

# **COVID – 19 Guidelines**

## **FOR CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

**(incl. Weddings & Funerals)**



*Revised*  
Re-Opening Taskforce of the Emergency Operations Center  
Government Administration Building  
Soualiga Rd #1, Philipsburg

*The following guidelines are proposed for the churches, religious organizations and for persons having gatherings in closed/indoor locations.*

*COVID- 19 is spread through the behavior of individuals and organizations and the ignorance of basic preventive measures. It is a new virus, which can affect every person and because it is often exhibited with mild symptoms, it can still be out there in our society.*

*Organizations of learning such as the faith-based organizations are encouraged to educate the population on the proper etiquette to mitigate and avoid the spread of the virus.*

*It is therefore recommended that each establishment prepares and implements a Covid-19 Prevention plan based on the guidelines and their specific context. And that the prevention plan be shared with its congregation.*

Each organization is requested to take the following into consideration:

**GENERAL:**

1. Establish visible signs and notices encouraging members to observe the measures and practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
2. All persons gathering for the services/meetings should sanitize their hands with an appropriate sanitizer prior to entering the building.
3. A hand sanitizer station should be set up close to the door for people entering and leaving the building.
4. Social distancing should be maintained at all times
5. Monitor the members on flu-like symptoms and if they do display such symptoms, request them to return home and contact their family doctor or, if not available, contact CPS at 914.
6. Markers must be used on benches and chairs placed no less than 2 meters (6 feet) apart in every direction.
7. Ensure proper ventilation, avoid the use of air conditioning or AC units if possible, keep all windows and doors open during the service wherever possible.
8. Continuously remind members of the congregation of the hand and respiratory hygiene, sanitization and social distance rules to be followed before, during and at the end of service.
9. Modify specific religious rituals, and services, to avoid/limit touching, shaking hands, holding hands (i.e. during prayer), hugging, or kissing.

## **SEATING:**

1. Each church should ensure that members are seated 2 meters away from each other.
2. Where this is not possible, the church should ensure that persons entering the building wear masks for the duration of the service.
3. When addressing the gathering, the speaker should observe a minimum physical distance of at least 2 meters from the congregation. And because when speaking to the congregation there is more projecting, pastor may consider wearing a face shield
4. The elderly and persons with underlying health conditions are more vulnerable and susceptible to the COVID virus and are advised to remain at home.
5. Children under 12 years old should worship together in separate youth meetings and/or sit only with their family members of the same household during regular services

## **SANITIZATION:**

1. Regularly sanitize frequently touched surfaces.
2. Ensure that microphones and podiums are cleaned before and after each service.
3. All restrooms are to be cleaned and sanitized regularly throughout the scheduled service.
4. For each service, appropriate facilities and adequate supplies not limited to, but including hand-washing facilities, running water, soap, paper towels, bins, hand sanitizer and disinfectant must be provided.

## **OFFERINGS:**

1. Modify the method for collecting regular financial contributions – use a stationary collection box, the mail, or electronic methods – instead of passing a collection tray and thereby limiting the multiple touching by congregation members
2. When using stationary collection boxes for offerings, ensure that social distancing is maintained, by those who are going to the box.
3. Also ensure that sanitizing station is placed next to the box and instruct those who deposited funds to sanitize their hands immediately thereafter.

## **COMMUNION:**

1. Ensure that physical distance is observed, where communion services are held.
2. Individuals involved in distribution must use hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol.
3. Congregations that practice communion should ensure that there is no sharing of communion elements, but that it is individually provided.
4. The communion elements should be placed in the recipient's hands without touching and not be put on their tongues.
5. Furthermore, drinking from the same cup is not allowed.

## **LENGTH OF SERVICE:**

1. If 2 meters distancing is only partially possible and masks are therefore being used, then consider to limit services to about 90 minutes.
2. More than one (1) service can be held on the same day, however there must be sufficient time in between each service to facilitate proper sanitization of frequently touched surfaces at the venue.
3. Assign a member or members in each service to monitor the observation of all measures.

## **FUNERALS:**

1. A maximum number of persons needs to be determined in accordance to 2 meters distancing at funeral services, whether it's at the church or at a grave site.
2. All relevant preventive measures (i.e. social distancing, hand hygiene and hygiene etiquette) must be observed.

## **OTHER CEREMONIES (INCL. WEDDINGS):**

1. A maximum number of persons should be determined in accordance with 2 meters distancing at weddings, whether it's at the church or at a reception.
2. All relevant measures (i.e. social distancing, hand hygiene and hygiene etiquette) must be observed.
3. Other ceremonies including baptisms should be carried out ensuring proper measures, such as masks, hand sanitization, and social distancing

## **OPENING OF CHURCH OFFICES:**

1. Church offices can be open to facilitate administrative and counseling services, as well as distribution of supplies to the needy or less fortunate.
2. All relevant measures must be observed.

## **FOR CHURCH GOERS:**

1. Maintain a 2 meters distance at all times.
2. Stay at home if you are sick.
3. Stay at home if an individual or individuals from your household has any flu-like symptoms or have been tested positive with COVID-19.
4. Call your family doctor. If you do not have a family doctor, call CPS at 911.
5. Practice proper hygiene measures:
  - Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol if soap and water are unavailable.
  - Hand soaps must not be diluted.
  - Cough and sneeze into tissue and discharge tissue right after to a bin or if there is no tissue cough into your inner elbow. Wash hands after coughing.
  - Individuals must leave the building if they have a persistent cough.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid close physical contact with others, who are not members of your household.
  - Wear an appropriate face mask covering your nose and mouth upon entering and leaving the building, if 2 meters distancing cannot be maintained.
  - Stay informed and follow the advice provided by the Ministry of Public Health, Social Development and Labor

## **GUIDELINES FROM PUBLIC HEALTH REGARDING THE USE OF FACEMASKS, GLOVES AND FACE SHIELDS**

**There is no need for the use of face masks, gloves and/or face shields when social distancing of 2 meters is respected and regular hand washing with soap and water or a sanitizer is practiced.**

The virus can be contracted by droplets of an infected person by:

1. Being directly inhaled by another person who is less than 2 meters from the infected person through openly coughing, sneezing or having close physical contact such as kissing, hugging or sexual contact.
2. Another person touching his/her mouth, nose or eyes after touching the surface where droplets of an infected person have landed (hence the importance of regularly sanitizing frequently touched objects).

If social distancing of 2 meters cannot be practiced or realized, face masks, worn properly (covering both mouth and nose), are sufficient.

- Bear in mind that surgical masks need to be properly disposed of after use or after getting wet.
- Cloth masks need to be washed regularly.

It is important to note that face masks and gloves can cause a false sense of security, thus becoming more of a liability than an asset if not worn properly. Therefore social distancing is always recommended.

Face masks need to cover both mouth and nose.