



ARCHDIOCESE
of BALTIMORE

**COVID-19
PROTOCOLS SUMMATION**

Updated August 19, 2021

Introduction

As COVID-19 and the associated variants continue to threaten the health and safety of our parishioners and our local and global communities, the Archdiocese of Baltimore remains committed to continuing to offer a full worship experience, educational and community programs and social ministries. The Archdiocese committed to each of these objectives while continuing to apply accepted protocols and practices to protect our parish, school and larger communities. To this end, the Archdiocese is issuing the following guidance to ensure consistent practice and adherence to these practices and protocols.

Altar Servers

- Altar servers may be employed with the permission of their parents.
- Altar servers who are not vaccinated should wear a masks throughout the duration of the Mass.
- Altar services in those jurisdictions with masking mandates must comply with the order.

Camps and Programs:

- Parishes should continue to offer camps and programs.
- All such programs should include the appropriate level of COVID-19 protocols based upon the nature of the activities, the size of the group, the age of the group, the venue of the activities and other such considerations.
- All programs must have in place, protocols for timely and thorough **contact tracing** and **reporting** of COVID cases to the [Office of Risk Management](#) and if applicable the local health departments.

Capacity

- There is currently no jurisdiction limitations on the capacity of gathering and parishes should continue to allow attendance as permitted based upon the capacity established per the fire rating of the facility.
- Parishes need to monitor their local jurisdiction for the establishment of any capacity restrictions.
- If a parish learns of a capacity restriction in your local jurisdiction please notify the Office of Risk Management by sending a note to riskmanagement@archbalt.org.
- If a local jurisdiction does implement a capacity restrictions, the parish should abide by that restriction until or unless advise otherwise by the Archdiocese.

Child Care and Nurseries

- Parishes that so chose may continue to offer child care and nursery services for individuals attending mass.
- It is the responsibility of those offering the services to ensure all participants follow to all COVID-19 protocols to safe guard the children in their care.
- All local jurisdictional requirements must be met by those providing the services.

Children's Mass

- Parishes may continue to offer children’s Masses.
- Parents are strongly encourage to provide masking for their children, particularly while participating in the group setting of the children’s Mass.

Collection Baskets

- Parishes can continue to use collection baskets, including those which are past between congregants.

Communion

- Parishes are to continue to offer the distribution of Communion both in the hands and on the tongue.
- Parishes are to continue to have in place, the table nearby to provide for supplies to complete hand sanitization when necessary.
- While current guidance states one must only sanitize their hands after making contact with a person’s tongue, lips or face and not after each communicate, please be sure to sanitize when needed. (A number of concerns have been submitted over the past several months that ministers of the Eucharist are failing to sanitize their hands even on a periodic basis).

Distribution of Printed Materials

- Parishes can continue distributing printed materials, including bulletins and other documents to parishioners.

Facility Cleaning and Sanitization

- While the evidence continued to demonstrate that COVID-19 had a low level of transmission from touch services, there is concern among the health experts that moving into early fall, there will be a likely surge of both influenza and respiratory illnesses.
- Long standing and accepted science has demonstrated that both influenza viruses and the viruses associated with respiratory illnesses, do in fact transmit through touch surfaces.
- Parishes are encouraged to return to a more robust cleaning and sanitizing protocol.
- Parishes also need to be prepared to carry out cleaning and sanitization of the impacted portions of your facilities if you learn within 48 hours that an individual who has tested positive, was in your facilities.
- Parishes should consider use of long acting treatments such as Vytis Shield to provide long term protection that will reduce the need for regular sanitizing.
- Additional work is underway by the Archdiocese to evaluate other means and methods of sanitization. Once more is learned as to the effectiveness of these alternatives, additional information will be provided. Parishes and facility staffs are required to reconstitute the cleaning and sanitization efforts. Sanitizing is not required between each Mass, but with the concern over other transmittal diseases via touch surfaces, sanitizing should be completed on a daily basis of all high contact touch services.

Food

- While there is no evidence that people can get COVID-19 from eating food, the process of bringing individuals together for gatherings that include the consumption of food can still be a source of community spread.
- The providing of food or drink during meetings, activities or hosting a gathering such as a bull roast, require protocols in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The measures include but are not limited to the following:
 - No sharing utensils and or congregating around a food service area.
 - When feasible food offered at any meeting or event should be individual servings and be placed in pre-packaged boxes or bags.
 - Potluck, buffet, or family-style meals need to be carefully managed. Avoid sharing of foods.
 - If the parish or school hosts an event that includes food service, refer to CDC's COVID-19 considerations for [restaurants and bars](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html>.
 - Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals not from the same household remain sufficient separated when waiting in line, waiting to pick up orders or while seated.
 - Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher.
 - Individuals should [wash their hands](#) after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.

Hand Sanitization

- Parishes should continue to make available supplies for hand sanitization.
- Parish should continue to have posted information about hand sanitizing and encouraging this activity.

Holy Water

- Holy water will continue to be made available for use.

Greeting of Parishioners/Processions

- Clergy may greet members of the assembly as they arrive and/or depart from the church.
- Gatherings in the vestibules of the church by congregants should be discouraged.
- Gatherings of congregants outside of the church are acceptable.

Hymnals and misselettes

- Parishes are to continue to make hymnals and misselettes available.
- Parishes should increase the level of cleaning and wiping down hymnals and misselettes as best as possible as the influenza and respiratory illness season approaches.

In-Home Gatherings

- Parishes can continue the practice of permitting in-person gatherings in private homes.

- Parishes wishing to sponsor such activities must ensure the homeowner where the sessions will be held, is fully agreeable to such use and will work to ensure reasonable measures are taken to ensure the health and safety of all in attendance.
- Parishes should provide to hosts, guidance as to practices to be in place to ensure the gatherings are conducted in such a manner to safeguard against the introduction and spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- Rosters of those in attendance should be maintained for a minimum of 60 days after the activity in the event contact tracing is required.
- All other pre-pandemic requirements and guidance, particularly as it relates to Child and Youth Protection, must be adhered to and closely monitored by the parish.

Jurisdictional Orders

- It is important for each parish to carefully monitor and enforce restrictions mandated by local jurisdictions.
- If you should learn of any guidance or have reason to believe updated guidance is available please share by sending to riskmanagement@archbalt.org.

Liturgical Ministers

- Parishes should continue the practice of having altar servers, lectors, and Eucharistic Ministers included in the celebration of Mass.

Lord's Prayer

- The faithful are not to communally hold hands during the Lord's Prayer, unless they are members of the same household.

Masking

- All parishes, including for worship and other parish based activities are to abide by and follow any state or local jurisdiction health orders which require masking.
- Parishes where there is no mask mandate are to continue to encourage those who are not vaccinated to consider using masks for their and others protection.
- If a parish is experiencing particular circumstances, such as an outbreak of COVID-19 and in the judgement of the pastor and parish leadership, the adoption of mandated masking is needed, those locations are to notify their Vicar Bishop to discuss the adoption of masking prior to the issuance of a health order to do so.
- With respect to Catholic schools falling under the direction of the Department of Catholic Schools further details will be released as to the guidance for masking requirements.
- For parishes and schools that are co-located, any programming occurring in the school building once the school year has begun, must comply with the standard of masking as established by the Department of Catholic Schools.
- For those locations in a jurisdiction that have mandated masking by the jurisdiction or if a parish has moved forward with a masking mandate prior to a health order and with the consent of the Vicar Bishop Office, this is a reminder that those refusing to wear are mask while attending mass are **not** to be forcibly removed. It may help to remind attendees of the existence of the order or if it is parish mandate and that wearing of a mask is considered an act of charity and should be practiced by all individuals.

- With respect to masking and parish-based activities, other than attending mass, if an individual fails to comply with the local order if one is in place or the policy of the parish to institute mandatory masking, then the person can be denied access to attending the activity.
- With respect to masking and employees working on the campus, if they are in a jurisdiction requiring masking or the parish has adopted a policy of mandate masking, if the individual claims to have a qualifying circumstance, that circumstance should be accepted on its face as truthful. Employee taking such exemptions need to be prepared to provide proof if required by local health authorities at the time of an inspection, if one were to be conducted.
- Parish may opt to offer sections of the church for those who wish to be masked and other sections for those who are unmasked. Again the objective is to offer alternatives to the faithful that will allow them to be more comfortable while attending mass.

Presentation of Gifts

- Parishes should continue with the offertory procession to include the presentation of the gifts.
- We recommend that sanitizer is provided on the table, where those presenting the gifts can sanitize their hands prior to picking up the gifts and delivering them to the altar.
- If more than one individual is proceeding to the altar with the gifts, those individuals should be members of the same household.

Processional

- Entrance/recessional processions down the center aisle are to continue. The amount of time the procession is near the congregants does not constitute close contact.

Response Protocol- COVID-19

- Responding properly at the time a presumptive or positive COVID-19 case is presented must continue to be a key operational consideration for all parishes. As these procedures can be confusing, we wanted to provide clarification below particularly regarding the 10-day isolation for those confirmed as having COVID, as well as the 10 days quarantine requirement for anyone who has been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19. As each parish works through these considerations, please be sure your response protocols clearly address the following:
 1. For an individual who has **tested positive for COVID-19**, this individual must self-isolate for a period of no less than 10 days from the first onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic 10 days from the date of the administration of the positive test. Moreover, the individual who has tested positive must complete the period of isolation and be symptom-free for a period of 24 hours at the time of completing the self-isolation.
 2. For an individual identified as having come into **close contact** with a positive COVID-19 person, that individual must complete a period of **quarantine for 10 days** from the **date of last exposure to the person diagnosed positive for COVID-19**. Receiving a negative test for COVID-19 during the period of quarantine **does not** release the individual from the period of quarantine. Additionally an exposed individual now has the options to be tested on or after the 5th day of quarantine and may return on the 8th day after last exposure if the COVID-19 test is negative. With respect to close contacts, close is still defined as being within 6 ft. of the positive individual for a period of 15 minutes.

In accordance with the new CDC guidance with respect to those who are in close contact of a confirmed positive individual, if vaccinated the close contacts who has been exposed need not quarantine if they meet both of the following criteria:

1. The individual must have received the appropriate number of vaccinations. (Single or two depending on the vaccine administered)
2. It has been 14 days since the individual received the prescribed number of doses of the vaccine.

It is imperative to note persons who do not meet both of the above criteria should continue to follow current [quarantine guidance](#) after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Additionally, fully vaccinated persons who do not quarantine should still watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 14 days following an exposure. If they experience symptoms, they should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated. In addition, vaccinated persons should continue to follow **current guidance** including masking if those so elect, social distancing, hand sanitization, travel requirements and other preventative protocols practiced in their local jurisdiction.

Confirmed COVID Positive Notification Protocol for Parishes

When your parish is notified that an individual who was on your campus or who participated in a parish activity has tested positive for COVID-19, the first, figure out whether or not the person was symptomatic or tested positive within 48 hours of having been on the parish campus or participated in the parish activity. To make this determination you need three pieces of information:

1. What was the date the person was last on campus or participated in a parish activity?
2. Did the positive individual experience any symptoms prior to being tested? If yes when did the symptoms begin?
3. If the person had no symptoms but tested positive for COVID, on what date was the test administered?

If there is less than 48 hours between the response to the first question and either question 2 or 3 then your parish needs to determine if there were any close contacts to the positive individual. If the timeframe was longer than 48 hours, no action is required.

If it is determined there was a potential exposure at your parish, the parish must work with the positive individual to determine if anyone else came into close contact with that individual. "Close contact" means coming within 6 feet of the positive person for a period of 15 minutes. If individuals are identified as close contacts, those individuals must be notified of this determination. They should be advised they should consider quarantining and if needed, seek medical advice. Once the close contact tracing is completed, if applicable, a notice letter should be sent to the impact group or if the parish is impacted, a notice should be sent to all parishioners using social media. A sample notice letter has been provided as an addendum to this document.

Sick and Shut-in Ministry

- Parishes are to continue to provide care for the sick and those who are shut-in.

- Participating ministries should be encourage to be vaccinated, but it should not be mandated. However if he location being served, such as a nursing home or hospital, requires vaccination verification, then the assigned minister must be able to provide proof of vaccination.
- Efforts must be made to determine the medical status of those being visited prior to making visits. Ensure the individuals are not currently ill with COVID-19 like symptoms or other symptoms suggestive of communicable illnesses.
- When in-person visits are not feasible, parishes are encourage to offer outreach through telephone contact, video chat or other electronic means of communicating.

Sign of Peace

- The Sign of Peace should be included in the Mass.
- Parishioners that are not members of the same household should be encouraged to share the sign of peace with no physical contact.

Singing and Choirs

- It is acknowledged that COVID-19 and its variant is principally spread through droplets emitted by those infected with the virus. It is also acknowledged that singing increase both the amount and distance those droplets can be spread. It has also been demonstrated that certain measures can be taken to reduce the extent to which singing and choirs can be a source of spread.
- Each parish must evaluate their facilities, the placement of choirs or other musical assemblies, the potential to have buffers such as shields in place and the use of other mitigation measures to determine the best practices for their parish.
- It is essential that pastors and parish leadership look for means to maintain the richness and fullness of the liturgical experience by providing music and singing at a level appropriate for the individual circumstances of the parish. Parishes are not to adopt a minimalist approach to the liturgical experience through the reduction or elimination of singing or music merely as a convenience. If there are circumstances or particular concerns at a parish that does require drastic reductions in the liturgical experience up to eliminating singing and music, parishes are encourages to seek out solutions to promptly return such elements to the liturgical experience as soon as and as safely as possible.
- For parishes offering choir performance, choir members cannot be mandated to be vaccinated in order to participate in the choir. The members can be strongly encouraged but again, not mandated.

Social Activities

- Parishes are to continue to offer social activities.
- Those activities must incorporate any mandated health orders, such as masking, if required.
- The activities should also be evaluated and incorporate as feasible appropriate COVID-19 protocols such as hand sanitization, limiting crowd sizes if possible, offering the activity outdoors when possible and the like.
- Proof of vaccination should not be required as part of the protocols for allowing participation in a parish activity, unless the venue where the event is to be held makes it part of their requirements for use of the facilities.

Social Distancing

- Social distancing remains an accepted means by which individuals can protect themselves from contracting COVID-19 or one of its variants.
- There is currently NO mandatory requirements associated with social distancing.
- Parishioners should be encouraged as possible to practice reasonable distancing.
- Parishes may consider providing specific areas of the church as designated spaces with additional social distancing of between 3'-6'.

Third Party Use of Facilities

- Parishes and schools may continue to rent out their facilities to third party users.
- Third party users must be advised of any specific COVID-19 protocols. Particular emphasis must be placed on advising of any jurisdictional mandated requirements, such as masking.
- Locations should adjust pricing as needed to cover the cost of the additional cleaning and sanitization efforts, completed after the facility has been used.

Transportation

- Parishes can continue various activities, including those where group transportation is a need.
- In order to ensure the safest possible means of transportation, the following protocols are to be followed:

Multi-passenger Vehicles (Buses, Special Activity Buses, Coach Buses)

- All parish-sponsored and off-campus travel must be approved by the pastor, parish administrator or their designees. Ministries planning to travel off-campus must obtain approval before entering into any contract of service with a transportation vendor or before entering a rental agreement. Parish vehicles are not to be used for group travel off of the parish campus without the required approval as well. The individual responsible for planning the trip must ensure all travel restrictions or limitations that could impact the planned trip are addressed and reviewed as needed with the pastor, parish administrator or their designee when seeking approval.
- Each passenger must complete a wellness screening before boarding the vehicle. The wellness check must verify the following:
 - The passenger is not currently experiencing any COVID like symptoms.
 - The passenger has not been exposed to anyone within the past 10 days that is COVID positive or presumptive COVID positive.
 - The passenger cannot be awaiting test results for a COVID test, unless such test was administered for reasons other than the individual being suspected of having COVID or having had close contact with someone with or suspected of having COVID-19.
 - Checking of each occupant's temperature with a touchless thermometer before entering the vehicle is strongly recommended.
- Hand sanitizer is required to be offered as each occupant enters the vehicle. Each occupant shall be encouraged to thoroughly sanitize their hands.
- All multi-purpose specialty activity buses, buses or any other forms of transportations must be limited so as to allow for appropriate social distancing. Passengers must sit as far apart as possible

- All occupants of the vehicle must wear face coverings.
- Windows should remain at least partially open for the duration of the trip to provide additional ventilation. If safe to do so, windows should remain partially open as well between each leg of the trip.
- Limit the use of the air conditioning and the heat when the vehicle's windows cannot remain open.
- When groups are traveling together using multiple vehicles, every effort should be made to assign individuals to travel groups that remain consistent throughout the individual trip and, if possible, throughout the series of trips.
- Ensure those vehicles that provided by transportation operators are thoroughly cleaned prior to use.
- Each parish shall provide to parents the opportunity to transport their child directly to and from the venue.
- There should be no consumption of food while in the vehicle.
- Occupants may momentarily remove the mask to consume a drink which the passenger has brought onboard.
- During travel, stops shall be limited as much as reasonable where occupants will be exposed to others such as at rest stops, gas stations and convenience stores. Stops where all occupants can remain away from others, beyond the occupants of the vehicle, are permitted.

Private Passenger Vehicles

Parishes are allowed to resume the use of carpooling for parish events that are occurring offsite. All guidance that was in force prior to COVID-19 remain in force including the age of the driver, the verification of an approved driving record and affirmation of current auto insurance on the vehicle. In addition, until further notice, when carpooling all occupants of the vehicle must wear a mask during the duration of the travel. This guidance is in line with the Governor's order which requires the use of face coverings on public transportation. The only exemption from face coverings would apply only if all members in the vehicle are from the same household.

Additionally, guidance applicable to multi-passenger vehicles are also applicable to passenger vehicles, including but not limited to wellness screenings, ventilation, and occupancy by the same individuals and in the same seats.

Travel Out of State

- There are currently no domestic travel restrictions.
- There are currently some restrictions, or at minimum testing and quarantining requirements for international travel. Those electing to travel internationally must comply with all testing and quarantine guidance as published by the State Department, the CDC or other applicable regulatory bodies.

Use of School Facilities for Parish Ministries

- For those parishes co-located with a Catholic school, they are strongly encouraged to collaborate with one another to ensure the joint use of school facilities.

- As part of that shared use, those participating in parish programs and attending school programs must be subject to and guarded by the same level of safeguards and preventative measures.
- Maintaining the protocols and of the facilities must be a shared responsibility.
- Parish staff that use the school facilities for ministries and school administrations are strongly encouraged to work together and meet regularly to ensure all users of the facilities are current as to the applicable protocols and shared role for ensuring the highest level of adherence to the protocols.

Vaccinations and Mandates

- At this time the Archdiocese has **NO** intention of mandating vaccinations for COVID-19 by staff, volunteers or those seeking to attend mass or other parish or school functions.
- The Archdiocese remains committed to promoting the use of the vaccine. Parishes and schools are encourage to host vaccine clinics, encourage parishioners, students who are eligible and family members to be vaccinated.

In addition, it is the position of the Archdiocese that parishes and schools are NOT to require proof of either vaccination or negative testing as a condition of employment, volunteering or participating in any programs offered by the schools and parishes.

The Archdiocese does continue to encourage individuals to be vaccinated and reminds all those that are not vaccinated to follow the current guidance from the CDC and MDH to be masked indoors if not vaccinated.

Ventilation

- Parishes are reminded to continue to ensure all heating and air conditioning equipment are operating properly and efficiently.
- As is feasible the parishes should continue to ensure adequate fresh air supply for all facilities as provided through the mechanical system as well as when appropriate and safe to allow doors and windows to be opened, even if slightly.
- In previous guidance, it was recommended when feasible to leave doors propped open. This was both to help with ventilation as well as to reduce the risk of common touch areas.
- It is also important that the parish regularly service or have serviced their HVAC equipment.

Wellness Screening/Notifications

- Parishes are to continue to provide reminders (signage and communications) to those attending Mass to consider NOT attending if:
 - they do not feel well
 - live with a family member that is experiencing COVID-like symptoms
 - in close contact with a person who either has COVID-19 or is suspected of having COVID-19 within the past 14 days
 - awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test themselves
 - otherwise been ordered to quarantine or isolate

- For parish operations and in-person activities, the parish must provide similar reminders and signage or a daily wellness screening process for staff, volunteers and participants of all in-person programs.

Addendum

Name of Parish

SPECIAL NOTIFICATION REGARDING COVID-19 CASE

Dear Parishioners,

During the ongoing pandemic, our parish has worked to keep the wellbeing of our parish community at the center of all our planning and decisions. As challenging as these times are, we are committed to proper safety measures, transparent communication, and responsibly adapting to emerging circumstances. It has come to our attention that an individual in attendance at _____ has tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19). Our parish has reached out to this individual and understands that they are currently in non-critical condition that they are engaging appropriate quarantining. In accordance with the safety precautions required by the parish, the individual remained socially distanced from other parishioners and was wearing a facemask while in attendance at Mass. Our parish leadership has been in communication with Archdiocesan officials to ensure that all necessary follow-up procedures are undertaken in an efficient manner. We encourage those who attended the _____, especially those who fall into a vulnerable category and are at greater risk for exposure to COVID-19, to actively monitor your health and be alert to any of the major symptoms of the virus, including, but not limited to, fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath. Should any concerning symptoms appear, please do not hesitate to contact your medical professional or, if severe, call 911. Should you or a member of your household who were at the _____ receive a positive coronavirus test, please alert the parish office at _____ so that appropriate action can be taken. We recognize that this news may generate concern, anxiety, and hesitation for our parishioners, even those who may not have attended this specific Mass. We have contacted any person who may have had close contact with this individual. We encourage everyone to wisely assess their own personal situation and to make decisions that will protect the health of all involved. The coronavirus remains a significant public health risk, and each of us has a responsibility to act safely based upon the most current information on hand. Once more, please recall that the Archbishop has extended the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. We ask that our parish community continue to hold in prayer and solidarity all those suffering with COVID-19, most particularly those within our community. Thank you.

Sincerely, Pastor _____

Cc: Archdiocese of Baltimore Office of Risk Management