



Catholic Diocese of Columbus

Memorandum

To: All Priests
From: Fr. Mike Hartge; Bill Davis
Date: June 1, 2021
Re: COVID Recommendations – June 2021

The rules and regulations issued by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) have changed significantly over the past several weeks. As of June 2, Governor DeWine will lift all Health Orders except for those related to specific areas such as nursing homes/assisted living facilities, hospitals, public transportation, etc. As of May 13, 2021, the CDC has issued new guidance as follows (from CDC Website):

Fully Vaccinated Individuals:

- Fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance
- Fully vaccinated people can refrain from testing following a known exposure unless they are residents or employees of a correctional or detention facility or a homeless shelter

In general, people are considered fully vaccinated: [±]

- 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine

Non-Fully Vaccinated Individuals should:

- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others who don't live with you.
- Get a COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to you.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.

Ultimately, both the State Orders and CDC Guidance allow entities to evaluate their own specific circumstances and issue their own rules.

Above all we should be guided by Christian Charity and respect for all those who we interact with, and the choices they make, particularly around the use of masks and social distancing.

Based on the latest guidance from CDC, and questions posed by Pastors and Business Managers, we offer the following guidance for issues your parish may be facing:

Symptomatic Employees

We recommend returning to pre-COVID encouragement to employee's that if they are sick, stay home. If they feel they have COVID-type symptoms, particularly if unvaccinated, we would highly encourage them to be tested.

If an employee tests positive for COVID, we would recommend they stay home until the symptoms have abated for at least 72 hours without the use of medication.

Operational Guidance

1. **Masks/face coverings** - are to continue to be worn only as follows:
 - a. If an individual is uncomfortable being in an environment where others are not masked, individuals should feel free to continue wearing a mask.
 - b. If an individual is not fully vaccinated, the new CDC guidance recommends that they continue to wear a mask.
2. **Social distancing** - as shown in the CDC guidance, individuals who are not fully vaccinated are recommended to still socially distance. Those fully vaccinated may choose to socially distance at their own discretion.
3. **Hymnals, Missalettes, etc.** - many of you have removed these items from the pews. You may choose to return these items to the pews, as again, there is support that the virus spread from inanimate objects is minimal.
4. **Choir and Congregational Singing** – many of you have minimized the use of choirs and significantly reduced congregational singing. There is support that the virus spread occurs from face to face interaction, which is not typically the case during these activities. So, you may choose to resume having choirs and returning to normal congregational singing.
5. **Offertory Basket** – many of you stopped passing the offertory basket and simply put a basket at the back of church. You may choose to resume the practice of passing the basket at offertory time.
6. **Offertory Procession** – The offertory procession in many places has been suspended. You may choose to resume the practice of the offertory procession at Mass.
7. **Receiving and Consuming the Eucharist** – there have been reports from parishes of finding hosts or partial hosts in the pews or even on the floor following Mass. We would recommend that parishioners be reminded of the proper reception of the Eucharist and that it should be consumed prior to returning to their seat.
8. **Holy Water** – it is recommended that we resume offering Holy Water as we did prior to COVID, as the use of Holy Water is voluntary. We would also recommend that you change the offered Holy Water regularly and look at cleaning fonts more often.
9. **Sign of Peace** – it is recommended that we resume offering the sign of peace at the appropriate time during Mass, and with the appropriate invitation as described in the missal. Bishop Brennan will be providing a separate letter to be read on Corpus Christi mentioning his recommendations.
10. **Receiving from the Chalice** – Bishop Brennan will be providing a separate letter with his recommendations on this item. It is expected that the offering of the chalice to the faithful will

continue to be suspended for the foreseeable future. Bishop Brennan's Corpus Christi letter will be used as a catechetical opportunity to remind the faithful of the doctrine of concomitance. In cases of someone in your parish being unable to receive even a low-gluten host, the pastor and the individual can work out a solution of receiving from a separate chalice reserved for that particular scenario.

11. **Live Streaming of Mass** – St. Joseph Cathedral has made the decision to continue live streaming of the 10:30 Sunday Mass (<https://www.columbuscatholic.org/live>). Our recommendation would be that you continue to offer your own live streaming, if feasible. If it is not, then please provide your parish families with the link to the Cathedral Mass, as there still may be those who do not feel comfortable attending Mass or being in other public settings. It is also a medium that offers the home bound a way to connect. The general consensus seems to be that the number of offerings may decline, but that there will still be that medium available.
12. **Worship Area Arrangements** – in a message from Bishop Brennan on May 15, he stated “I am asking pastors to begin immediately to implement steps to allow more people in the church for Mass. This will mean different steps in different parishes according to the size of the church and the numbers of people attending Mass. Some parishes might be prepared to begin using all pews right away. Others may have the space to continue distancing if the need exists and there is sufficient space. Still others, might find that they have parishioners who would appreciate a designated section with spacing as a more gradual approach is applied. You know your facilities and the needs of your local parish community.”
13. **Office Procedures** - Visitors will again be allowed to enter our buildings. We recommend that your staff follow the CDC guidelines as to their own choice of wearing a mask or not. As for your visitors, it is up to them to know and follow the CDC guidance on masks and social distancing.
14. **Supplies** - such as masks, sanitizer, etc. should continue to be available in all of your buildings as a courtesy for those who continue to wear masks and those who wish to sanitize their hands.
15. **Employee Travel and Attendance at Large Gatherings** - for any of your employees who have plans to travel away from home, or attend a large group gathering, and they do not meet the CDC guidelines for being fully vaccinated, they should follow both CDC and State guidelines related to quarantine following their return. All who travel should make sure to check Federal guidelines for those traveling on planes or public transportation, where masks are still required for all individuals.
16. **Signage** – the general recommendation is that as you loosen restrictions, you should consider removing signage which no longer applies, such as Masks Required signage. Considering how complicated the communication of the new CDC guidance would be, we do not recommend instituting new signage.
17. **Sanitizing** - many of you have been sanitizing your worship space between Masses and sanitizing other areas after use. You may choose to discontinue this practice as there is support that the virus spread from inanimate objects is minimal.
18. **Gatherings Greater than 10** – many have asked about the State Health Order limiting gatherings to 10 people. Previously there were numerous exceptions to this. But the official Order will be lifted effective June 2.
19. **Parish Picnics** – guidance we have received is that the virus is much less likely to spread at outdoor events. This is true regardless of masks and social distancing. Our recommendation would be that as you plan, consider how much is done outdoors and how much is done indoors (like food service). You should also consider any extras you are planning on, like bounce houses, etc. that may bring people closer together, especially children.
20. **Vacation Bible School** – typically the participants in VBS are under the age of 12, and not currently eligible for the vaccine. However, there is significant support that children in this age group are less likely to carry and/or spread the virus. Parents should be offered the choice on whether

their children are to wear masks. Your volunteer leaders should also know that children are not required to wear masks and make their own choice on whether they would prefer to wear one.

21. **Childcare/Nursery** – given the age of those in childcare and nursery, these services may again be offered, but will need to be accompanied by good communication. Parents who participate should be told your mask policy and be given the opportunity to determine whether they want their children to wear masks. Sanitization should return to pre-COVID practices.
22. **Funeral Luncheons/Senior Luncheons/KofC Gatherings/etc.** – These events may again resume. The only consideration we can offer would be food services. Although no longer mandated by the State, we should be careful in how these are arranged to protect those going through the line and those who follow them. Prior Orders from the State recommend that food be put on the participants plate by a server to limit how many individuals touch serving utensils. This would still be recommended where possible.
23. **Use of Waivers** – we will no longer ask parents or participants to sign a COVID waiver form in order to participate in activities.
24. **Facility Rental** – we recommend that you resume offering rental of your facilities using pre-COVID practices and normal parish and diocesan policies.
25. **Vaccination Status** - Please be aware that you have the right to ask the question of whether an individual is vaccinated, including asking this of our employees. We may not, if they answer no, ask why not as this potentially would violate HIPPA regulations.

As many of our parishioners return to Mass, it will be very important to offer catechesis as well as clarity around the practices you will implement for Mass. We would recommend that this include:

- Proper receiving and consuming the Body of Christ
- Receiving from the Chalice
- Sign of Peace
- Holy Water

It is Bishop's intention to provide a letter outlining his recommendations on these areas that can be read and published to your community on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

We would also recommend that you consider holding meetings of your liturgical ministers, including Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Greeters, and Servers, so that they are clear on issues like masks and the duties being reinstated (like servers holding the Missal, and Greeters again passing the offertory basket). This may also offer an opportunity for retraining those who have not practiced their ministry in over a year.

If other questions arise and you would like our thoughts in resolving them, please do not hesitate to contact me at wsdavis@columbuscatholic.org or Fr Hartge at mhartge@columbuscatholic.org.