

## Template for Reopening of Church Activities During Covid-19 Vaccination Period March 2021

As Covid-19 vaccinations begin to roll out and more information becomes known about Covid-19, four churches in Seattle, WA, worked together to discuss plans to begin on-site gatherings. We developed a template to guide our church leaders as they make decisions about regathering. The contents are not intended to be authoritative. But they are a set of guidelines, principles and applications developed collaboratively by our churches as we prayerfully consider the physical and spiritual health of our respective congregations during this pandemic.

### 1. Introduction

- a. Pandemic and prolonged isolation has greatly impacted the spiritual health of the church and its members
- b. The purpose of this update is to provide our churches with a template upon which church activities may resume in the setting of rolling vaccinations until “herd immunity” can be achieved (approximately 70-90% of the population has been vaccinated and Covid-19 infections declines to a low level).
- c. This template is based on current scientific knowledge of the Covid-19 virus and our concern for the safety and welfare of our members, especially those most vulnerable to the complications of the virus.
- d. This template draws from a recent article written by Dr Daniel Chin on the various factors that churches should consider in their decision-making about regathering: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/january-web-only/church-reopening-vaccine-coronavirus-covid-advice.html>. Please refer to that article for more information.

### 2. Guiding principles and values

- a. Science: Based on scientific data and what is known of the Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) virus and the efficacy of vaccinations.
- b. Safety: Concern and care for the safety and welfare of our church family, especially those most vulnerable to the complications of the virus or the effects of isolation during this pandemic.
- c. Others First: Personal and group decision-making should be guided by biblical principles of putting the interests of others before our own interests and seeking after the good for others. (See Philippians 2:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-24).
- d. Public Health Guidelines: Follow local public health guidelines/requirements.
- e. Pivot Ready: Flexibility in our policies. There has been and will be new developments and new information in the course of this pandemic that will alter our understanding of the virus’ transmissibility, complications, treatment, and prevention. We need to be flexible enough to alter our plans when new information become available.

### 3. Vaccination information

- a. It will generally take up to 2 weeks after the completion of a vaccination series to get the full protective benefit of a vaccine.

- b. Covid-19 vaccines have so far significantly reduced the risk of serious complications and deaths from the virus.
  - c. Scientists are working to determine whether vaccines can reduce the transmission of the virus. Thus, there is a possibility that a vaccinated person can appear well but can still transmit the virus to their close contacts, including unvaccinated family members and co-workers. Vaccinated members should take into account the risk of their close contacts, and their risk for serious Covid-19 complications, when making their decision about regathering.
  - d. Covid-19 virus variants with greater contagiousness are emerging. Current vaccines are still effective in preventing serious complications from these variants. But this could change with newer variants. Thus new versions of the vaccines may be required in the future.
  - e. Vaccinations are not a substitute for known effective measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (i.e., continue masking, hand washing, social distancing, adequate ventilation, etc.). **It is critical that we continue these protective measures even as vaccinations are rolled out, and even more important as more contagious variants become more widespread in our communities.**
4. General considerations of when and how to regather for church activities
- a. Use the rate of Covid-19 infection to guide when specific in-person activities can resume (see attached table from Dr. Chin's article).
  - b. Each church will follow the stepwise approach to resume gatherings but the level of infection for resuming gathering may vary.
  - c. When gatherings involve **only those who have been vaccinated**, this can begin when there is a higher level of Covid-19 infection (compared to when gatherings involve both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals).
  - d. When restarting a specific type of activity, minimize Covid-19 transmission by adhering to the following rule: 3C + 1M.
    - i. **Crowded spaces:** should be minimized, providing ample space and distance; no overcrowding.
    - ii. **Closed spaces:** should be minimized, creating open air flow as much as possible. Outdoor gathering is safest.
    - iii. **Contact time:** should be minimized as much as possible.
    - iv. **Masks:** masks should be worn to all activities. Make sure the mask fits snugly against your face. Consider cloth masks with multiple layers of fabric or wear one disposable mask underneath a cloth mask. Layering helps keep your respiratory droplets in and others' out.
  - e. Encourage church attendees to take responsibility to reduce their risk of exposure to the virus before gathering with others. Take into consideration one's exposure risk. How likely are you to be exposed to the Covid-19 virus? Use the Covid-19 risk calculator: <https://covidrisk.link>
  - f. Consider one's own risk for serious Covid-19 complications, including the risk of those you live with. With greater risk of complications, regather with others when infection level is lower.
5. Guidance for specific types of gatherings

- a. Individual meetings: Follow the 3C + 1M rule when meeting one-to-one. Safest for vaccinated members to meet with other vaccinated members.
- b. Small groups:
  - i. It is safest to form a group bubble or pod where individuals have similar risks of being exposed to others (i.e. similar types and amount of contact with others) or have all been vaccinated. Meet in bubbles with a "Covenant of Safety."
  - ii. Small groups may decide to have hybrid meetings where vaccinated members can meet indoors together while still provide online platforms for those unvaccinated to join in.
  - iii. Do not recommend meals together when group meetings first restart at the recommended infection threshold; wait until infection rate is lower.
- c. Worship
  - i. Churches can decide whether they want to host in person worship services only for those who have been vaccinated. This can be done at a higher level of Covid-19 infection than if unvaccinated congregants are allowed to participate.
  - ii. Worship/Livestream/Facilities team members may not have been vaccinated yet, therefore still need to be safeguarded. Implement 3C + 1M. If there are unvaccinated ministry team members, consider livestreaming the service to another room within the church for those who have been vaccinated. Best for those who have been vaccinated to serve as ushers, moderators, etc. for this group.
  - iii. Church leaders and facilities managers need to ensure that proper church protocols are adhered to for those gatherings (masking, temperature screening, social distancing, ventilation, hand sanitization stations, recording of seating location, tracing documentation, etc.). Disinfection of frequently touched surfaces is needed but no need for extensive disinfection otherwise.
  - iv. Continue to livestream for those who are not vaccinated until the level of infection is low enough for them to gather in-person.
- d. Sunday School, Adult Discipleship Classes and Fellowship meetings
  - i. Sunday School and other classes can start at a higher level of infection than Fellowship meetings because there are more interactions with fellowship meetings (e.g. sitting across from and more talking with each other, and perhaps even singing)
  - ii. Important to minimize the 3C's of gathering at the start of these gatherings, and wear masks throughout the gathering time.
- e. Children's ministry
  - i. We need more information about the safety of resuming children ministry before we can recommend when to restart. As such, children's ministry and programs should remain on hold.
- f. Overnight retreats/large gatherings with food and drinks

- i. These are considered very high-risk activities, therefore we are not recommending them until herd immunity is achieved within the community.

The Covid-19 virus has been a challenge to the physical and spiritual health of those in our churches. By God's grace, we will get through this pandemic together, and we look forward to the day when we can all see each other face-to-face in Christian fellowship and community.

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## Guidance on when and how gatherings can take place

<b>Threshold of infection rate for starting activities (based on 7-day average of daily cases)</b>	<b>Activities for unvaccinated congregants gathering with or without vaccinated congregants</b>	<b>Activities with vaccinated congregants gathering separately</b>
Very high (more than 10-12 daily cases per 100,000 residents)	Outdoor gathering only (as permitted by local regulations)	All outdoor activities and indoor small group allowed (as permitted by local regulations); other indoor activities allowed once infection rate is less than 25 daily cases per 100,000 residents
High (10-12 daily cases per 100,000 residents)	Indoor home small group can start	All indoor activities allowed
Medium (5-6 daily cases per 100,000 residents)	Indoor church worship can start	All indoor activities allowed
Low (1.5-2 daily cases per 100,000 residents)	Indoor fellowship/Sunday School can start (except those at high-risk for COVID-19 complications)	All indoor activities allowed
Very low (less than one daily case per 100,000 residents)	Indoor fellowship/Sunday School for all can begin	All indoor activities allowed
Additional considerations	<p>Continue to maintain physical distance, use face masks, and wash hands for all activities.</p> <p>Continue to follow all local regulations for gatherings.</p> <p>For the activities starting at each threshold, start with smaller number of individuals and lower room capacity (e.g. 25 percent capacity) and with individuals who have lower risk of exposure to COVID-19.</p>	<p>Continue to maintain physical distance, use face masks, and wash hands for all activities.</p> <p>Continue to follow all local regulations for gatherings.</p> <p>Would not allow very high-risk activities such as overnight retreats or large gatherings with meals until herd immunity is achieved in community.</p> <p>We need more information on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines among those less than 16 years of age before we know whether activities in this age group can start earlier.</p>