



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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CITY OF CHICAGO ANNOUNCES REOPENING GUIDELINES FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

New guidelines allow for limited in-person religious gatherings as well as requirements for social distancing; Seniors and individuals with underlying health conditions strongly encouraged to continue practicing remotely

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced today guidelines for organizations to hold in-person religious services. The “Be Safe. Places of Worship” guidelines come as the city moves into Phase 3 “Cautiously Reopen” of the “Protecting Chicago” framework. Under the new guidelines places of worship can welcome congregants back to their doors with a maximum of 50 people per room or 25 percent of the room capacity, whichever is fewer, as long as required social distancing can be maintained.

“For people of faith, worshipping together is an essential function, and I am grateful for the Chicagoans of faith who explored new ways to celebrate their beliefs virtually in the interest of the health and safety of everyone during the stay at home order,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “As we take this next step into Phase 3 of reopening, we can cautiously return to in-person services to bring our communities back together and begin to heal from the past few months.”

Under the new guidelines, a maximum of 50 people can attend in-person services per room as long as the recommended six feet social distancing between individuals not of the same household can be maintained. Houses of worship will also need to ensure that they protect congregants by maintaining healthy interactions, safe spaces and conditions, and operational resiliency and travel guidelines.

"As we cautiously reopen, we want people to start doing the things that bring them peace and joy, but to do so safely and smartly," said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D. "If we don't continue to take these important precautions, we could very well see a resurgence in cases that would mean more infections and more deaths."



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Although many Chicagoans are eager to return to in-person faith services, CDPH recommends residents who are elderly or with underlying health conditions continue to practice their faith remotely, through services on television, radio or online, until the COVID-19 data supports new guidance.

“As houses of worship are given clearance to open their doors to fifty people or less, I passionately ask faith leaders to carefully examine the cause and effect of allowing people into the building; permission does not mean you must participate,” said Reverend L. Bernard Jakes, D.Min., Senior Pastor, West Point Missionary Baptist Church. “Faith leaders have found a myriad of ways to adapt for the past eleven weeks, and another few weeks could save the life or lives of parishioners, as well as their families, especially our most vulnerable.”

For the past several weeks, the City has been working directly with faith leaders across denominations to draft guidelines to bring people back to services, while also keeping everyone safe. These guidelines are drafted to allow a gradual transition into in-person worship services while still adhering to recommended guidelines to prevent spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

“We are fortunate to have a mayor who not only genuinely cares about the health and safety of all city residents, but actively sought our input and the input of Chicago’s other faith leaders,” said Rabbi Shlomo Soroka, Director of Government Affairs, Agudath Israel of Illinois. “We were gratified to see that our concerns and suggestions were listened to and incorporated.”

As part of the guidelines, religious organizations must follow these protocols:

- No more than 50 individuals in a room if distancing is followed;
- Stagger ingress and egress times to avoid checkpoint crowding;
- Frequently disinfect facilities;
- Provide sanitation stations available throughout facilities;
- Wear facial coverings;
- Spread out seating by 6 feet to promote social distancing; and
- Post visual signage throughout the facility regarding hygiene, social distancing and proper PPE among others.

“It has been an honor working with the Mayor and other faith leaders to plan how to safely and gradually reenter our houses of worship,” said Reginald Sharpe, Senior Pastor, Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church. “I look forward to welcoming back the faithful to church and continuing this interfaith and intergovernmental summit for the good and future of all Chicagoans.”



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Regardless of an organization’s reopening plans, all residents should continue to abide by important guidance in phase three, including: physically distancing and wearing a face covering; limiting non-business, social gatherings to <10 persons; staying at home if you feel ill or have come into contact with someone with COVID-19; and getting tested if you have symptoms.

Last week, Mayor Lightfoot and CDPH released industry-specific guidelines for businesses, employees, and customers to follow as they begin to safely reopen as part of Phase 3: Cautiously Reopen. Specific guidelines are currently available for childcare, commercial buildings, residential buildings, hotels and accommodations, food service, retail, personal services, health and fitness clubs, manufacturing, construction, warehousing, healthcare, CTA, taxi and ride hail, and parks and outdoor attractions.

Specific guidelines for sporting events, outdoor performances, summer programs and youth activities, the Lakefront, and museums will be available later in Phase 3 when those entities are predicted to begin reopening.

To download a copy of the “Be Safe. Places of Worship” guidelines or to learn about the City of Chicago’s Cautiously Reopen plans in other sectors, visit www.chicago.gov/reopening

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