



Illinois South Conference COVID-19 Response UPDATE #16, Nov 4, 2020

New State Mitigation Guidelines Now Active for All Public Health Regions

The Restore Illinois plan divided the state into 11 regions when the shelter-in-place order was lifted, with criteria for reinstating stricter guidelines if any region had a rise in specific Covid-19 metrics. All 11 regions are now under mitigation guidelines, which of course, includes all Illinois South Conference congregations. Check for your specific region to determine how long the mitigation measures will stay in place.

The mitigation guidelines specifically name weddings and funerals as activities that should be postponed until infection rates drop. Another important guideline is the lowered limit of no more than 25 people gathered or 25% of capacity, whichever is lower, for social events. The guidelines are vague as to whether this applies to worship, or if worship is considered an essential service. Some local health officials have said they will definitely apply the guidelines to everyone, and others say they will ignore all mitigation measures.

You and your congregation will need to decide what is the safest, most logical course of action for your particular situation. Consider the age and relative health of your congregants and clergy. We strongly encourage each of our congregations to practice the safest worship they can. These guidelines were instituted in the interest of public health. They are not intended to limit anyone's ability to worship.

If your congregation has meet virtually this year, we encourage you to return to or continue that practice. If you have been gathering in person outside or in your sanctuary and don't plan on going virtual again, limit your gathering to 25 people or 25% of your capacity, whichever is less.

As has become the norm in this Covid time:

- Continue wearing masks, especially if meeting inside.
- Keep social distance in all settings from anyone you don't live with
- Wash your hands vigorously and frequently, and don't touch your face
- Keep multi-touch surfaces as clean and sanitized as possible

Do you wonder why grocery stores and big box stores remain open, but churches are asked to worship online?

It doesn't seem fair that people can freely go to Walmart when we can't freely go to worship, does it? Here's why these rules exist. It has to do with degree of potential exposure to COVID-19, and the amount of time you spend near the same people.

When you go shopping, you spend very little time in front of the same people, moving between aisles and frequently even checking out your own cart. You spend a relatively short amount of time inside, moving constantly, and you don't linger with any one specific person.

When you go to worship, you spend an extended period of time inside near the same people. If someone were COVID positive, there's a much greater chance that person would spread the virus because they're in the same place longer, and near the same people longer. To gather without a mask, particularly to sing, ramps up the odds of infection dramatically. This is why churches are grouped with indoor restaurant dining and hair salons under stricter mitigation measures, because they all have the same environment.

Church can be essential without risking your weakest members getting sick.

Helpful Information

The Illinois Department of Public Health has excellent maps illustrating COVID-19 hotspots in the state. [One map](#) gives general information, and [another map](#) shows the specific COVID-19 metrics that are being monitored for each county.

- If you need a refresher on best practices, refer to: **Faithfully Phasing Forward**, the ISC guidebook, on the [Conference website](#); the UCC's many [COVID-19 resources](#); and the [Restore Illinois](#) Plan.

Together in Christ's ministry with you,

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