

CHANGING COURSE AS COVID-19 CASES RISE

Risk-sensitive recommendations for Greater Northwest Area ministries

OVERVIEW

We know many churches have been making their plans and decisions as cases have risen - changing and adapting based on risk. Other ministry sites have been asking for some additional guidance, so we offer these recommendations for you to consider. No two ministries are identical, so we have tailored our advice for the 'average' church (defined below), understanding that each church will adapt as their situation warrants.

This guidance is explicitly offered for Option 2 (Safe Local Practice) churches, but Option 1 (Basic Standard Practice) churches may also wish to consider this guidance when the situation warrants. Note that Option 1 churches may not take advantage of any relaxed restrictions offered below; doing so requires signing the Option 2 commitment form.

The following recommendations reference the overall risk assigned to a ministry site's county on [CovidActNow](#). As always, we expect all ministries to follow state and local guidance when it is more restrictive than recommendations provided by the GNW COVID-19 Response Team.



Our Recommendations

LOW RISK - Under 1 daily case per 100k

- Outdoor settings are always preferred when practical; masks optional.
- Indoors, masks are optional (except where required by state/local authorities) but strongly encouraged, especially for singing.

MEDIUM RISK - Between 1 and 10 daily cases per 100k

- Outdoor gatherings, masks optional (except where required by state/local authorities), but strongly encouraged, especially for singing, no time limit.
- Indoor gatherings, with masks, no time limit.

HIGH RISK - Between 10 and 25 daily cases per 100k

- Outdoor gatherings with masks, no time limit. No outdoor consumption of food, except for communion elements, with masks removed for a minimal amount of time.
- Indoor gatherings limited to 50 people with masks, no time limit; no indoor consumption of communion elements, no indoor food consumption.

VERY HIGH RISK - Between 25 and 75 daily cases per 100k

- Outdoor gatherings with masks and social distancing, no time limit; no outdoor consumption of communion elements; no outdoor food consumption.
- Indoor gatherings limited to 25 people, with masks and social distancing, maximum 30-minute duration, minimum of 60 minutes between gatherings; no indoor consumption of communion elements, no indoor food consumption.

SEVERE RISK - Over 75 daily cases per 100k

- Outdoor gatherings with masks and social distancing, maximum 60-minute duration, minimum 30 minutes between gatherings; no outdoor consumption of communion elements; no outdoor food consumption.
- Indoor gatherings limited to 10 or less, with masks, social distancing, maximum 30-minute duration, minimum 60 minutes between gatherings; no indoor consumption of communion elements, no indoor food consumption.

Other Items

SINGING

For specific guidance on singing, please refer to the [existing music recommendations](#) based on weekly case rates, in addition to these general recommendations. We've only mentioned singing in these new recommendations where we feel extra caution may be warranted due to extreme transmissibility of the Delta variant. Because of the unique risks associated with singing, our singing guidance does not align perfectly with CovidActNow's categories, even as it uses the same data.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE 'AVERAGE' CHURCH

We based our recommendations on the assumptions about the 'average' church listed below. Each ministry site should make appropriate adjustments based on its conditions. For example, a church with a larger sanctuary and smaller congregation may have less risk. Similarly, a multigenerational congregation with a large children's ministry may have more risk.

- Mixed ages, but skewed to those over 65
- Few 'at risk' individuals (unvaccinated adults or children under 12, those who are immunocompromised or have significant underlying health conditions)
- Moderate ventilation; either ability to create a significant cross breeze with open windows and doors or forced air ventilation with typical filtration (not state of the art/not HEPA)
- Sanctuary space is about 2000 square feet or less

RISK MITIGATION

These recommendations use a layered approach to risk mitigation, understanding that the following mitigations are possible for most ministry sites. We based this on the understanding that no single mitigation effort is fool-proof and that each contributes to lowering overall risk.

- Outdoors vs. indoors (dispersion and sun help)
- Without any singing vs. with singing (singing produces significantly more aerosol than speaking)
- Masked vs. no masks (masks protect others)
- Social distance or not (distance protects everyone)
- Size of gathering (easier to maintain social distance, less aerosol buildup, less risk of a large-scale outbreak if it goes wrong)
- Duration of gathering (less buildup of aerosols, less overall exposure risk)
- Time between gatherings (clear aerosols from the previous gathering)