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Before We Gather

Planning for Social Distancing

As your ministry gears up to resume normal church operations, you may be curious about how to use social distancing to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. You can learn more about the benefits of social distancing (avoiding close contact; keeping 6 feet apart when in public) in this article from the CDC: [social distancing recommendations](#).

What does social distancing look like at church? We've compiled a list of areas to consider so your team can begin making plans. If your ministry does decide to use social distancing measures, communication will be key. Be sure to let your attendees, staff, and volunteers know about any changes and what to expect in advance.

Social Distancing in the Parking Lot

Questions

- What could social distancing look like in your parking lot?
- Is your parking lot usually a place where your attendees gather before or after services?
- Is your parking lot usually filled for each worship service? Half filled?
- Do you have security staff, church staff, or volunteers that usually monitor the parking lot? Will they need to be trained to do anything differently?

Ideas

- Directing vehicles to alternating sides of the lot can help keep space between attendees as they arrive and walk from their cars to the church.
- Filling the closest parking spots to the entrance first and then continuing out to the farthest spots helps keep traffic flowing and gives people space as they walk to the entrance.

- Leaving every other space open can help maintain distance between attendees as they arrive and as they leave.
- Using arrows, signage, cones, or cordons helps guide people from their cars to the designated entrances of your building.

Social Distancing in the Entrance/Lobby

Questions

- Which door or doors would you like people to enter through?
- Which doors will they exit through?
- Are there areas in the entrance or lobby where groups of people tend to gather before, after, or during your services?
- Is your entrance/lobby staffed by security, greeters, or staff before, during, or after your services? Do they need additional training?
- Will you need to limit the number of people that can be in the restroom at one time?

Ideas

- Directing people through the outer doors instead of the center doors of your entry can help keep people separated.
- Training your greeters to verbally welcome attendees and direct them to the sanctuary can help keep the entry way from becoming congested.
- Planning for sanctuary ingress and egress accommodates for one-way traffic flow in and one-way flow out, which helps to maintain distancing among people.
- Using signage, floor decals or tape, cones, or cordons provides a visual guide to help direct people through the entrance to the sanctuary.
- Limiting areas where people usually gather in the lobby may include delaying the opening of bookstores and coffee or refreshments.
- Temporarily removing café tables or blocking off the resource center, bookstore, or refreshment area can help eliminate areas that may require extra cleaning between services.

Social Distancing in the Sanctuary

Questions

- How many people does your sanctuary normally accommodate? Will this work with social distancing measures in place?
- How will you fill the rows and how will you dismiss to help with social distancing?
- What signage do you need?
- Can the worship team give reminders from the stage about how you will dismiss?

Ideas

- Remove chairs or block pews to maintain a minimum of 6 feet between worshipers who aren't immediate family members.
- Train ushers to fill seats from front to back, alternating sides to further maintain distance.
- Dismissing row by row, from back to front, alternating sides, can help maintain distance.
- Encourage attendees to arrive earlier than normal to avoid a large rush of people into the sanctuary at the last minute.
- If your ministry has the technology, utilize classrooms to host smaller groups of people who can watch a livestream of the service.
- Some ministries may want to approach inviting people to church by hosting small groups first, before moving to larger gatherings for Sunday services. Some ministries may only want to hold worship services without additional classes or children's ministry activities.

Combine Personal Precautions with Social Distancing

Reminding attendees about everyday precautions they should take and talking about steps you are taking regarding sanitation can help reduce your attendees' apprehension and protect against the spread of illness.

Questions

- Health experts recommend that individuals wear a mask when they go out in public to reduce the spread of the disease. Does your ministry plan to

encourage the use of masks for attendees or staff? Stay informed of the [CDC guidelines](#).

- Will you have hand sanitizer available throughout your building?
- Are restroom supplies fully stocked?

Ideas

- Use signage and make announcements before service to remind attendees about [CDC guidance](#) regarding everyday precautions like handwashing, social distancing, and cough etiquette.
- The [CDC offers](#) several posters that could help you communicate.
- Additional signage on your entrance door about following the ministry's safety practices, including a short assume-the-risk statement, may be helpful.

Our Thanks to Brotherhood Mutual for their contribution to this document.

Before We Gather

Back to Work, Back to Basics

Your ministry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic may have ranged from a complete shutdown to an entirely new way of reaching your congregation. Ramping up in-person operations requires a careful plan, too, especially if you are rehiring furloughed or laid-off employees, recalling volunteers, or even hiring new workers.

What's clear is that returning to your former routine may not be possible. You may need to incorporate new practices into your employee and volunteer management in addition to your existing procedures.

Return to the Basics

Resist the temptation to speed up the process of recalling or hiring employees and volunteers in the interest of expediency or returning to full operations. Safe employee practices are just as important now as before the pandemic. Here's what to consider:

Plan now for continued infections. Even though your state's rate of infection and illness may be trending downward, illnesses related to COVID-19 still are possible and you need to be prepared. Factor in the chance for a re-emergence of hotspots or viral outbreaks. How will your ministry respond to a sick employee, child care worker, or volunteer? Consider how you will respond now and brush up on newly created sick leave laws. Do your employees qualify? What's your exposure for a lawsuit?

Resource: [Employment laws and how they relate to COVID-19.](#)

Hiring new workers. Because your state may have implemented stay-at-home orders, you may have found inventive new ways of reaching attendees. Things that worked and you'd like to continue doing may mean an increase in staff or volunteer positions. When filling new positions, don't skimp on the background checks. Comprehensive screening involves an application, in-

person interview, a background check, and references check. Plus, what you need to know before hiring those out-of-school youths.

Resources: [Screening Guidelines for Churches and Camps](#). [Background Screening Checklist](#). [Hiring Youth](#).

Avoid liability: Keep good records. Accurate recordkeeping, especially payroll, is crucial. Have you kept separate records for furloughed or laid-off workers? Has your newly hired person completed required paperwork? Do you maintain daily records of cleaning schedules?

Resource: [Employment Practices Checklist](#), [Records Retention for Ministries](#)

Dealing with the backlog. Weddings, baptisms, memorial services, and more are a part of any church's daily schedule. But interruptions related to the pandemic likely caused many cancellations. Consider the enhanced workload when you return: answering phone calls, replying to emails, working with a jam-packed schedule. Do you need to create a temporary position to handle it all?

Resource: [Selecting and Screening Volunteers](#)

Expand volunteer coordinator position. When normal ministry operations resume, you may have an influx of people offering to volunteer or organizations looking for volunteer help. Does your current volunteer coordinator need more help?

Resource: [The Deacon's Bench: Volunteers](#)

Ask: did we hire an employee, volunteer, or independent contractor? Take the time to properly classify the person you just hired. Do you have an employee or a 1099 worker? Is an employee performing job duties "off the clock" simply to help out the ministry? Proper classification now helps avoid a lawsuit in the future.

Resources: [Use Caution When Classifying Workers](#), [Distinguishing Employees from Volunteers](#)

Watch for delayed mental health and addiction issues. The pandemic has created unique issues for workforces. Stress from pastors trying to do it all and often alone, families in isolation, financial concerns, loved ones falling ill, and grieving without a support system can exacerbate mental health and addiction issues. The fallout may not be felt for months. Support your pastoral staff and employees during this trying time. Ensure they know where

to seek help to de-stress, recharge, discuss depression, and deal with addiction issues. Pastors may need time off to connect with other pastors.

Resources: [The Deacon's Bench: Outreach](#), [The Deacon's Bench: Workplace Trends](#), [Full Strength Network](#), [4 Steps to Starting a Mental Health Support Group](#)

Rethink office space. Maintaining social distancing guidelines helps slow the spread of the virus. Rethink your office space with an eye toward keeping workers safe. Do you need to spread out your workers or move a few to unused spaces? Conduct meetings virtually instead of in-person? You should follow your local and state's guidelines when resuming operations, which may include wearing face coverings.

Resource: [Before We Gather: Facilities Preparation](#)

Additional Resources

- [Unemployment Assistance](#) through Families First Coronavirus Response Act
- [Good Employment Practices Protect Churches](#)
- Browse more resources on [Employee and Volunteer Management](#)
- [COVID-19 Resources for Ministries](#)

Our thanks to Brotherhood Mutual for their contribution to this document.

Before We Gather

Building Preparation – Deep Clean and Disinfect

Stepping up your cleaning and disinfecting practices can help minimize the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19 as you return to worship services. The coronavirus can be spread by touching a contaminated surface – it may be viable for hours to days on chairs, desks, pews, counters, door handles, phones, computer keys, microphones, and more. Experts say that cleaning of surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in community settings.

Ministries are encouraged to keep informed about your local and state government guidelines regarding when and how to get operations back to normal.

Cleaning Products

Using the right disinfecting product is important. It is expected that many existing disinfectants will be effective against the virus. The EPA publishes a [list of products](#) that meet the criteria for use against coronaviruses.

[CDC Guidance* on Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces:](#)

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

- Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix

household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach should be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water
- [Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

Advice from an Expert

To reduce surface contamination, it's important to follow a two-step process of cleaning and then disinfecting. "This means being a little more diligent with your procedures. For example, making sure to disinfect high-touch surfaces like light switches, doorknobs, touchscreens, and tabletops," said Tim Cool, chief solutions officer with Cool Solutions Group LLC. He reminds everyone that preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your work or gathering place takes a combination of every day precautions (washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, using hand sanitizer, disposing of used tissues properly, and following cough etiquette) and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces frequently.

Update Your Cleaning Procedures

As you plan to improve your cleaning and disinfecting procedures, ask your team questions to develop a robust process. The following questions can help you get started.

- What is our current cleaning and disinfecting process? What additional cleaning measures do we need to take?
- Are we aware of the most recent CDC guidance regarding cleaning and disinfecting?
- Do we have the necessary supplies to clean and disinfect surfaces? Some items include gloves, masks, cleaners, disinfecting wipes, and disinfecting sprays.
- Does our cleaning process concentrate on wiping down high-touch surfaces? Common surfaces include:
 - Sanctuary chairs/pews

- Door handles
- Table or counter tops (wipe the bottom side as well)
- Touch-screen electronics
- Restroom fixture handles
- Light switches
- Chairs in new mothers' room
- Changing tables
- If we decide to continue our children's activities, does our cleaning process involve high-touch children's activity surfaces? Common surfaces include:
 - Toys and bins
 - Doors
 - Handles
 - Tables and chairs
 - Sinks
 - Check-in stations
 - Touchscreens
- What other areas will require additional cleaning attention?

Cleaning Communicates Care

It's a good idea to communicate your updated cleaning procedures. "It's not going to cost much more to take your cleaning to the next level, but it will help give people peace of mind and communicates care," said Cool. Make sure to clearly communicate the steps you've taken to protect and care for your people.

When communicating with your congregants, include information about what you're doing to clean and disinfect your facilities. Use signage and announcements that outline what you're cleaning and frequency. It may also be a good idea to highlight the additional steps you're taking to encourage hygiene. For example, point out additional hand sanitizers, remind attendees of cough and handwashing etiquette, let them know about changes to offering or communion, and encourage the use of gloves and face coverings.

Additional Resources:

- The Coronavirus and Your Church
Facility: <https://www.smartchurchsolutions.com/blog/the-coronavirus-and-your-church-facility>

- IBHS – 6 Ways to Prevent a Virus from Disrupting Your Business: https://ibhs.org/wp-content/uploads/wpmembers/files/Business-Protection_Virus-Preparedness_IBHS.pdf

*Used with Permission CDC.gov

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Before We Gather

Communication Reduces Fear and Increases Connection

During this time of coronavirus, communication has been a key factor in keeping people connected. As your ministry makes plans to resume normal operations, ongoing communication with your employees, volunteers, and congregation remains an important element. Open communication about what to expect and any changes you plan to implement will help alleviate fear and anxiety. Ask yourself what *you'd* want to know, if you were a greeter, staff member, elderly church member, etc. Then, develop answers. You'll soon have a long list of things to say. Here's some guidance to help you get started.

Don't wait

It's important to start painting a broad picture of your ministry's plans for resuming normal operations as soon as possible. With some states lifting shelter-in-place orders in early May, people will have a lot of questions about how to safely gather for church services and community activities. Transparency is key. You don't have to explain every nuance, but it's important to provide enough details to reassure each segment of your audience.

Communicate often

Communicate as often as you can, through as many channels as possible. Even if you don't know all of the answers, it's important to share what you do know and be honest about what you don't. When the air is static with questions, few things fuel anxiety more than silence. It's comforting to know that your leaders are working to address concerns, even if they don't have solutions yet. More than half of the employees polled in late March said they would like daily coronavirus updates from their employer.*

Develop a core message

If you haven't already, develop a core message. It might reiterate your ministry's values or mission or simply provide reassurance. Ministry leaders will face numerous hurdles as they strive to resume normal operations. Having a core message helps you to express empathy and support over time.

Segment your audience

List each audience you'll address, along with their information needs. Most ministries have at least three groups: staff, volunteers, and church attendees. While your first message about resuming normal operations may be broad enough for the congregation, successive ones will need to include details tailored to each group of people. Don't forget to highlight information specific to vulnerable individuals, who are at higher risk for illness from coronavirus.

Topics to address

While details will differ by ministry, most organizations will need to address topics such as scheduling, logistics, sanitation, social distancing, and any changes in their operating procedures. Here are some points to consider for staff, volunteers, and attendees:

Staff

If any ministry staff are working from home, it will be helpful for them to have a plan for returning to the office. Some issues to address may include:

- **Timing.** How soon will employees be expected to return to the office? Will everyone come back at once, or will the process be phased or staggered? What options are available to staff members caring for children or vulnerable people?
- **Disease mitigation.** What efforts are being taken to sanitize the workplace and protect employees against illness? Are there any new social distancing requirements? Will masks or other protective gear be needed?
- **Vulnerable people.** Are any special accommodations being made for employees who are vulnerable to illness? May they work from home or return to the office at a later date than other staff?
- **Furloughed or laid-off employees.** What are the plans for bringing back any furloughed or laid-off employees? How soon might this happen? Will staff

resume their former positions? What steps have been taken to ensure that the ministry follows a fair process for deciding who comes back first, next, and so on? What changes might staff encounter, when they return to work?

Volunteers

- **Changes.** What should volunteers expect upon their return? Will they need to wear masks and gloves? Sanitize children's areas differently? Avoid shaking hands or passing an offering plate? How will greeters' roles change? What measures should volunteers take to protect themselves and others to prevent disease spread? Will you have new or existing volunteer roles to fill?
- **Disease mitigation.** What measures are the ministry taking to reduce the likelihood that volunteers get sick while carrying out their duties? Will certain high-touch ministries, like child care, be suspended or altered in order to safeguard volunteers?

Attendees

- **Logistics.** Will you hold in-person church services? Will you continue offering online services or alternative ways of connecting remotely? Will you do both, for some period of time? If so, how long will you offer off-site services for people who are too ill or too afraid to resume meeting with others? Have any weekend service times or locations changed? What's happening to mid-week gatherings, such as Bible studies, small groups, or youth activities?
- **Social distancing.** Will there be guidelines addressing how close people are allowed to sit near each other at church or for activities? Must they avoid shaking hands or stand a certain distance apart when talking to one another?
- **Disease mitigation.** What sanitation measures will the ministry implement to help prevent the spread of coronavirus? What areas will be sanitized? How often?
- **Changes.** What changes should people expect? Will communion be served differently? How will offerings be taken? Will there be coffee and donuts? Should parents of small children expect child care to be available, right away?
- **Vulnerable people.** What efforts are being made to protect people who are elderly, pregnant, or who have chronic lung disease? Some people may need to avoid all social gatherings – even worship services in other's homes – until there's a vaccine for coronavirus. How does the church plan to minister to this group of people?

Remember the big picture

You won't be able to answer every conceivable question. That's okay. Just do your best to thoughtfully consider the concerns that may come up and address them as best as you can. Every church is trying to figure out how to safely resume meeting together again. You're in good company. It's important to stay calm, keep the faith, and stay the course.

Resources

Many organizations are developing guidance on how to gather safely for ministry. While reviewing others' recommendations, keep in mind that every ministry's circumstances will differ. What works at one church may not be work for yours. Here are some resources that you may find helpful in developing a plan.

- CDC – Guidance for Communities and Faith-based Organizations
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>
- Coming Back Together After Coronavirus
<https://churchjuice.reframemedia.com/blog/coming-back-together-after-coronavirus>
- 24 Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return
<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>
- Guidelines: Opening Up America Again – The White House and CDC
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

* Edelman, Richard. “Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Brand Trust and the Coronavirus Pandemic Survey.” March 30, 2020. <https://www.edelman.com/research/covid-19-brand-trust-report>. Accessed April 24, 2020.

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Before We Gather

Taking the Touch Out of High-Touch Areas

Churches around the country are beginning to think about preparing to resume normal ministry operations. While conducting a deep clean is important, it's also beneficial for ministries to consider how they can limit possible germ spread in high-touch areas and on objects.

According to the CDC, common "high touch" surfaces typically include tables, doorknobs, light switches, faucets, sinks, and toilets. Churches also will want to consider the other objects or areas commonly touched through the course of their weekly activities.

These surfaces may include:

- Pews or chairs
- Bibles
- Hymnals
- Offering plates
- Pens
- Coffee pots
- Water fountains

Limit Touch Where You Can

As shelter-in-place orders begin to be lifted and you begin to make plans gather again, ministry leaders are encouraged to pay close attention to how you'll protect your congregation from the spread of germs.

Consider how you can limit or eliminate touch from high-touch surfaces. For instance, you could ask your congregants to bring their own writing utensils, Bibles, coffee, and water bottles, while you make these items temporarily unavailable. Churches who have access to a projector can project lyrics and Scripture references to limit the use of hymnals and pew Bibles. However, additional licensing may be required to copy lyrics to projector slides. See our [Complying with Copyright Law](#) article.

If your church “passes the plate” for your tithes and offerings, consider alternative means of taking an offering for the time-being, like a drop box, or online giving. See our [Giving in Digital Times](#) article.

You can address other, commonly touched surfaces by propping open select, monitored doors, if it’s warm enough, or having gloved greeters hold open doors at a safe distance. Additionally, consider closing off certain areas of your building – like low-traffic bathrooms – to concentrate cleaning.

Low-Touch Doesn’t Mean Low-Connection

As churches return to normal ministry operations, it may seem overwhelming to embrace the “new normal” of deep cleanings and limiting touch. That said, churches are encouraged to implement good risk management practices to try to create safe, healthy worship environments.

Resources:

- [CDC Guidance - Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- [Giving in Digital Times - Brotherhood Mutual Safety Library](#)
- [Complying with Copyright Laws - Brotherhood Mutual Safety Library](#)

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Before We Gather

Prepare your building now for the return of worship

Churches are eager to return to normal operations and welcome their congregations to sing praises to the Lord. As ministries across the country prepare for a gradual return to normal fellowship as a body, you may be wondering how your ministry can prepare its facilities to address health and safety. Here are steps you can take now to make sure your facilities are ready for normal operations.

Preparing Your Facility

Cleaning and maintaining your building shows care for your people and can help ease the worry of returning to corporate worship.

The following checklist items are provided by Cool Solutions Group, LLC. While not a comprehensive list of everything that may need attention in your facility, it's a good place to start. For a full checklist of items, see the Cool Solutions Group [facilities checklist](#):

- Deep clean your entire church. This may include shampooing carpets and cleaning floors. Also consider sanitizing pews and chairs, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, tablets, microphones, trash receptacles, remote controls, offering plates, items in the children's ministry, and other high-touch surfaces. This [article](#) provides best practices for cleaning and sanitizing your facility.
- Check all restroom and kitchen fixtures. Run water and flush toilets to confirm operation.
- Pour at least a half-gallon of water down every active floor drain.

- Inspect all interior and exterior components of the HVAC units. Clean coils, remove any debris, replace filters as required, and check the drain for the over-flow pan.
- Operate all the HVAC equipment in both modes to ensure proper equipment operation and control operation.
- Ensure proper operation of all interior lighting.
- Confirm proper operation of the sound system.
- Ensure all maintenance, custodial, and supply closets/rooms are cleaned and organized.
- Ensure all custodial supplies and equipment are clean, stocked, and available (including consumables like toilet paper and paper towels).
- Remove or secure all non-essential items on the property such as playground equipment or outdoor seating.
- Walk entire property before allowing operations to fully commence. Check all areas (including the exterior) and perform a final visual check for any items out of place or requiring adjustment.

In addition to preparing for the return of normal operations, now may also be a great time to look at your facility's deferred maintenance items. As your people return to church, it will be important to greet them with a clean and well-cared for property. Here are some additional items to check now:

- Check ceiling tiles for stains and/or damage. Replace/repair as required.
- Safely inspect the roof (if low slope) for any debris and remove as necessary. Repair any damage.
- Confirm operation of all drains, gutters, scuppers, and downspouts.
- Check windows for signs of cracked or missing sealant. Re-caulk as necessary.

- Operate all doors to check function and to look for worn or missing weather stripping.
- Make sure handrails are secured properly.
- Inspect all fire or emergency exit pathways/routes.
- Inspect and repair loose or damaged flooring.

Brotherhood Mutual provides additional preventive maintenance guidance in our online [Safety Library](#). This [article](#) is a great place to start.

Ministries are excited about returning to worship as a body. By taking some time to prepare your building, you'll convey the love and care that will help your people focus on worship.

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Before We Gather

What does children's ministry look like going forward?

As ministries begin gathering, there are still many questions about how to safely and effectively teach children and youth. Some are continuing to do online activities or are holding special family services geared toward youth. Others may choose a phased-in approach to gathering youth and children. Each ministry will need to decide what's best for their own congregation, but the following tips may help minimize the spread of respiratory illnesses as you consider how and when you'll gather your children and youth.

Wellness Policy

As children's ministry resumes normal operations, it is beneficial to provide parents and guardians of the children under your care with information regarding the church's policies and procedures. Consider posting your policy at every door, as well. This helps communicate the steps you're taking to minimize the spread of illness. It is important to note that while your ministry is taking care in its efforts to protect the children, the risk of exposure cannot be eliminated. It also helps parents understand your policy so they can prepare ahead of time. Consider the following points to include in your policy:

- Don't allow contagious children. Your policy should communicate that children's ministry is off-limits to anyone who has had a fever in the past 24 hours. As an additional step, consider purchasing a touchless thermometer (scanning forehead is common) and check every child before allowing him or her into the room.
- Volunteers who have been sick with any illness within the past 14 days or live with someone who is ill during the same time period should not be permitted to volunteer.
- Child care operations should stay informed of social distancing protocols and recommendations for your area.

- Implement a protocol of isolating a child when any symptoms of illness appear and develop a process to notify workers and parents that their child is ill.
- Temperature check your volunteers before they can serve in children's ministry.
- Require volunteers to wear face masks and encourage face masks for children older than two years and youth.
- Require frequent hand washing for all volunteers.
- Require hand sanitizer for each child as he or she enters and leaves the room.

Social Distancing

Keeping children at least six feet apart is challenging. If your ministry is considering implementing social distancing, consider the following ideas and what may work best for your ministry:

- Do you plan to start or continue virtual children's ministry teaching to keep children and families engaged?
- Does it make sense to start your children's ministry activities in phases? Some ministries are choosing to start with older kids who are more likely to maintain distance, then slowly gathering younger children.
- Does your ministry have additional classroom space to help reduce the number of children in a room?
- Can you safely use your outdoor space for children or youth ministry?
- Will your ministry open its nursery immediately or wait until later?
- How will you modify your check-in/out procedure to achieve a touchless process and maintain distance?

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Similar to your plans for cleaning your sanctuary and common areas, you'll want to consider your plan for cleaning and disinfecting your youth ministry rooms. Brotherhood Mutual provides tips about how to clean and disinfect your children's classrooms: [Read Article.](#)

Communicating every measure you're taking to maintain a clean and safe environment will help comfort parents as they drop off their children. Consider posting a sign on each children's ministry door that says when the room was last cleaned and when the toys were cleaned, if applicable.

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Before We Gather

Children's Ministry Prep - Cleaning and Disinfecting

Stepping up your cleaning and disinfecting practices can help minimize the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19 when you return to children and youth ministry activities. The coronavirus can be spread by touching a contaminated surface – it may be viable for hours to days on chairs, desks, counters, door handles, toys, and more. Experts say that cleaning of surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in community settings.

Ministries are encouraged to keep informed about your local and state government guidelines regarding when and how to get operations back to normal.

What's Your Game Plan?

As you plan to improve your cleaning and disinfecting procedures, ask your team questions to develop a robust process. The following questions can help you get started.

- What is our current cleaning and disinfecting process for the children's ministry rooms? What additional cleaning measures do we need to take?
- Are we aware of the most recent CDC guidance regarding cleaning and disinfecting?
- Do we have the necessary supplies to clean and disinfect surfaces? Some items include gloves, masks, cleaners, disinfecting wipes, and disinfecting sprays.
- Does our cleaning process concentrate on wiping down high-touch surfaces? Common surfaces include:
 - changing areas
 - counters

- tables
- chairs
- swings
- cribs
- activity saucers
- door handles
- light switches
- television remote controls
- Are we going to remove high-touch items from the rooms like books, crayons, and toys?
- Does our check-in and check-out process allow for volunteers to handle equipment to avoid multiple people touching computers or touch-screen devices?

Cleaning Products

Using the right disinfecting product is important. It is expected that many existing disinfectants will be effective against the virus. The EPA publishes a [list of products](#) that meet the criteria for use against coronaviruses.

CDC Guidance* on Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces:

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For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

- Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach should be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

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- 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
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- [Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow

the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

Cleaning Communicates Care

It's a good idea to communicate your updated cleaning procedures. "It's not going to cost much more to take your cleaning to the next level, but it will help give people peace of mind and communicates care," said Tim Cool, chief solutions officer with Cool Solutions Group LLC. Make sure to clearly communicate the steps you've taken to protect and care for your people.

When communicating with your families, include information about what you're doing to clean and disinfect your children and youth ministry facilities. Use signage and announcements that outline what you're cleaning and frequency. It is important to note that while your ministry is taking care in its cleaning efforts to protect children, the risk of exposure cannot be eliminated. It may also be a good idea to highlight the additional steps you're taking to encourage hygiene. For example, point out additional hand sanitizers, remind families of cough and handwashing etiquette, let them know about any changes to customary ministry activities, and encourage the use of gloves and face coverings for kids older than two years.

Additional Resources:

- The Coronavirus and Your Church
Facility: <https://www.smartchurchsolutions.com/blog/the-coronavirus-and-your-church-facility>
- IBHS – 6 Ways to Prevent a Virus from Disrupting Your
Business: https://ibhs.org/wp-content/uploads/wpmembers/files/Business-Protection_Virus-Preparedness_IBHS.pdf

Our Thanks to Brotherhood Mutual for their contribution to this document.

Before We Gather

Coverage Questions - Does our ministry have coverage for losses due to COVID-19?

Many ministries are inquiring whether they are covered for claims arising from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Hypothetical claims questions cannot be answered. The facts presented in a hypothetical situation cannot contemplate all of the different facts of an actual claim situation. Insurance company's claims analysis also needs to account for what's happening in each community regarding COVID-19 and the guidance given by local, state, and federal officials, which is changing rapidly. Each claim scenario is different, and each ministry's policy is unique.

The following points are important to keep in mind:

- The applicability of insurance coverage is determined at the time an incident occurs and is subject to applicable policy terms, conditions, limitations, limits, and exclusions.
- If your ministry believes it has experienced a loss due to COVID-19, we encourage you to submit a claim to your company's Claims Department. This can be done by contacting your local agent. The Claims Department will evaluate the facts of the claim and your ministry's policy in order to make a coverage determination. (Please note: submitting a claim does not mean the loss will be covered).

Below is a general overview about what insurance potentially may or may not cover:

Ministry Interruption

Business income and extra expense coverage is intended to address the loss of earnings and extra expenses which are incurred resulting from damage to property. Insurance company's coverage for business income, donations, and extra expense is subject to various terms, conditions, exclusions and other limitations. For coverage to potentially apply, it would require:

- The interruption of ministry operations because staff members have contracted COVID-19 (prior to any government-imposed closure of the facility); or
- The complete interruption of ministry operations in response to a civil authority order prohibiting access to ministry premises.

Proactively Canceling Activities

As a social distancing measure to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, ministry leaders may decide to proactively cancel services, camps, trips, classes, or other ministry related activities. While this is a good risk management measure, there would not be coverage available for loss of earnings and donations, as well as extra expenses resulting from the voluntary cancellations.

Liability Coverage

If ministry attendees were to claim they became infected with COVID-19 while attending church or other ministry activities, ministry attendees would need to show negligence on the part of the ministry as the cause of the infection for the ministry to be liable. General liability coverage may provide a legal defense to a ministry that is sued, as well as pay for court judgments arising out of such a lawsuit if a third-party claimant alleges that the ministry was responsible for his or her sickness. (Note: Liability coverage, like property coverage, will be subject to the policy terms, conditions, limitations, limits, and exclusions). A finding that the ministry is liable would be improbable because an individual would have difficulty establishing that the virus was acquired on the ministry's property or as a result of the ministry's operations. It also should be noted that the potential existence of the virus in any public setting is widely known and that voluntarily attending a gathering would be considered an assumption of the risk.

Similarly, medical payments coverage included with the general liability policy likely would not be available for COVID-19 related claims due to the improbability that an individual would be able to establish that the virus was acquired on the ministry's premises or as a result of the ministry's operations.

Workers' Compensation Coverage

Workers' compensation coverage is designed to cover employees' work-related injuries and occupational diseases. It is important to note that many states have workers' compensation statutes that exclude coverage for ordinary diseases of life (e.g. cold, flu, etc.).

Mission and Foreign Travel

Faith Ventures has posted a Q&A for its travelers on its website. Visit www.faithventures.com/coronavirus-information.

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