

Q: What is seen as a facial covering as referenced in the diocesan regathering guidance document?

A: Due to the fact that our congregations fall in different geographical areas with different guidance provided by each, the diocesan guidance document refers to facial coverings and does not specify whether this is a cloth mask or if this includes face shields.

We ask each of our churches that are in the cities where local jurisdictions have issued specific definitions (like Cincinnati, Columbus, and Dayton) to follow those definitions. If a church is in a location that has not issued a definition for facial coverings, then they should follow the CDC guidelines, which excludes face shields, as the default position.



Current issued guidelines

The state of Ohio mandates can be found at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/general-resources/cloth-masks-or-face-coverings-in-the-workplace>

Who is required to wear a cloth mask or face coverings?

The requirement to wear cloth face coverings applies to employers and employees at Ohio workplaces.

Why aren't face coverings required for customers, clients, and other visitors or guests?

Face coverings are strongly recommended for people who can safely wear them. The decision to exempt customers from the requirement was made to protect Ohioans who cannot wear face coverings, such as people who have severe asthma or breathing issues, hearing aids, autism, post-traumatic stress disorder, or claustrophobia

• **In Dayton, section 3 of the July 1 Ordinance states:** *For the purposes of this Ordinance, "face covering" means a piece of cloth, fabric, or other material that fully covers the mouth and nose and that is secured with ear straps or otherwise tied so as to prevent slipping.* A face covering may be factory-made or may be handmade and improvised from household materials. Face coverings include, but are not limited to, bandanas, scarfs, medical masks, and cloth masks; and also include respirators, N95 masks or other personal protective equipment that provides a higher level of protection than a face covering defined in this Section. **A face covering shall be worn so as to cover the mouth and nose in compliance with the CDC's guidance on wearing face coverings.**

• **In Cincinnati, section 4 of the July 3 Ordinance states:**

For the purposes of this Ordinance, "facial covering" means a piece of cloth, fabric, or other material that fully covers the mouth and nose and that is secured with ear straps or otherwise tied so as to prevent slipping. A facial covering may be factory-made or may be handmade and improvised from household materials. Facial coverings include, but are not limited to, bandanas, scarfs, medical masks, and cloth masks, and also include respirators, N95 masks or other personal protective equipment that provides a higher level of protection than a facial covering defined in this Section. **A facial covering shall be worn so as to cover the mouth and nose in compliance with the CDC's guidance on wearing facial coverings.**

• **In Columbus, Section 1 the July 2 Executive Order states:**

1. Definitions: *For the purposes of this executive order:*

a. **"Face covering"** means a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is simply wrapped around the lower face. A Face Covering can be made of a variety of synthetic and natural fabrics, including cotton, silk, or linen. Ideally, a Face Covering has two (2) or more layers. A Face Covering may be factory-made, sewn by hand, or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, bandanas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels. These Face Coverings are not intended for use by healthcare providers in the care of patients. **A face shield that covers the nose and mouth also meets the Face Covering requirements of this Executive Order.**

What does the CDC say about Cloth Face Coverings?

“Considerations for Wearing Face Coverings” - Effectiveness for Cloth Face Coverings Subsection <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/general-resources/cloth-masks-or-face-coverings-in-the-workplace>

Cloth face coverings are recommended as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. This is called source control. This recommendation is based on what we know about the role respiratory droplets play in the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, paired with emerging evidence from clinical and laboratory studies that shows cloth face coverings reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), so the use of cloth face coverings is particularly important in settings where people are close to each other or where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

What does the CDC say about Face Shields?

“Considerations for Wearing Face Coverings” - Face Shield Subsection <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html#face-shields>

It is not known if face shields provide any benefit as source control to protect others from the spray of respiratory particles. CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings. Some people may choose to use a face shield when sustained close contact with other people is expected. If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer’s face and extend to below the chin. Disposable face shields should only be worn for a single use.

Additional information from CDC:

- **About Face Coverings:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

Why It Is Important to Wear a Cloth Face Covering:

Cloth face coverings may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others. Wearing a cloth face covering will help protect people around you, including those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and workers who frequently come into close contact with other people (e.g., in stores and restaurants). Cloth face coverings are most likely to reduce the spread of COVID-19 when they are widely used by people in public settings. The spread of COVID-19 can be reduced when cloth face coverings are used along with other preventive measures, including social distancing, frequent handwashing, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.

Q: Why do the diocesan guidelines for safe reopening mandate wearing face coverings when it is not required by the state of Ohio, and both Cincinnati and Columbus exempt religious facilities?

A: Pandemic restrictions were never mandated for religious institutions in Ohio out of respect for First Amendment rights. However, many faith-based organizations, including the Diocese of Southern Ohio, elected to comply with stay-at-home orders to ensure the health and safety of their congregations, community and employees, and committed to respect the state's authority to fairly balance public safety and private freedom.

Now that we are cautiously starting to regather for group worship in a confined space, we are continuing to follow suggested safety protocol for face coverings and physical distancing. The state of Ohio strongly recommends wearing face coverings to help stop the spread of the virus, as does the Center for Disease Control. Multiple municipalities are now mandating face coverings due to alarming spikes in COVID-19 infections. We will continue doing everything we can to encourage safe interactions in our communities. As a religious organization we support the directives of our elected officials to promote the common good. Please refer to Bishop Breidenthal's [July 5, 2020 letter](#), where he writes:

When we are truest to what is best in our tradition, we Episcopalians are about honoring the state, even as we hold it to account. We have the opportunity to demonstrate this by supporting our governor in his efforts to help Ohio get the better of COVID-19. I thank all our congregations for your diligence, discipline and patience as we move through this time.

Q: Are we in Phase 1 or Phase 2?

A: Congregations may now make the decision to move into Phase 2 at this time. The factors that will help guide the decision to move into Phase 2 are:

- Check public health indicators for your specific area. Guidelines say that the COVID-19 infection rate for your county must be either **flat or declining for two weeks** before moving into Phase 2. You can find this information on the CDC's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) and more specifically on your specific county health department site.
- Congregation's ability to follow the guidelines issued as it relates to disinfecting, wearing of masks, etc.
- Setup of building if it allows physical distancing. We have been using the physical distancing guideline for our churches as the controlling piece of information for reopening.

At this time there is no indication as to when Phase 3 will occur. We estimate that this may take several months, but will communicate as more information comes available. Also, keep in mind there is a possibility of moving back to Phase 1 if public health orders require us to do so.



Q: When congregations re-open, are they guided by the amount of space they have for physical distancing, their 50% occupancy rate, or a cap on the number (like 10)?

A: For worship gatherings, each congregation needs to make their decision on how many can safely gather in their specific space; with a **maximum** of 50% occupancy and taking into consideration physical distancing of at least 6 feet between family units. It is advisable for larger congregations to have a limit **lower than** 50% to start, and to work up to that level over a few weeks by observing how people react to the distancing requirements and wearing of masks.

Q: Do our social distancing guidelines also control the admittance of small groups and outside groups such as AA, etc.?

A: Yes. Any group entering the building must agree to comply with the social distancing guidelines, wearing masks and sanitization rules. It is suggested to start with a limit of 10 people for these groups and work up to larger numbers (not exceeding 50% of occupancy) depending on size of the room. Each meeting room should display maximum occupancy and have only enough seating available for that number. In addition, it would be helpful to display a floor plan diagramming how to ensure the 6 foot distancing.

Q: What liability does the church have if someone contracts the virus while attending a service or using the church for a meeting?

A: There is no special provision in Church Insurance policies regarding COVID-19 liability. It is recommended that a cautionary statement be published in the invitation to reopen that attendance at worship is subject to the risk of contracting the disease and that by attending you are voluntarily assuming that risk. Our chancellor has suggested this wording but it should not be used as a standalone statement:

“We ask that all present observe our guidelines and rules for health and safety during worship. We cannot and do not guarantee the absence of risk from your presence with us.”

Church Insurance Co. has provided this guidance: For liability, a covered occurrence is defined as an accident (aka unforeseeable) and we do not know if this type of loss (claim in terms of COVID-19) fits that definition. Additionally, we do not know how courts will see this type of suit since it has never been tested. In general, coverage opinions suggest coverage is unlikely but again, we cannot answer the question definitively without specific details of a loss. Of course, the best defense against lawsuits is to avoid negligence. In any event, we will review every claim on a case-by-case basis

Q: Is the liturgy of Spiritual Communion authorized until actual reception is allowed?

A: Bishop Breidenthal has indicated that this is acceptable. Some churches are using this traditional prayer from the Army Prayer Book:

In union, O Lord with the faithful at every altar of Thy Church, where the Holy Eucharist is now being celebrated, I desire to offer Thee praise and thanksgiving. I present to Thee my soul and body with the earnest wish that may always be united to Thee. And since I can not now receive Thee sacramentally, I beseech Thee to come spiritually into my heart. I unite myself to Thee, and embrace Thee with all the affections of my soul. Let nothing ever separate Thee from me. May I live and die in Thy love. Amen.

You also can find an expanded, modern liturgy in St. Augustine's Prayer Book (Forward Movement, 2014) pp. 190-193.

