Guidance FAQs
Faith Institutions, Funeral Homes, Mortuaries, Cemeteries
(Updated 03-23-2021)

Below are answers to frequently asked questions about the Oregon Health Authority’s (OHA) Sector Guidance for Faith Institutions, Funeral Homes, Mortuaries, Cemeteries. OHA provides these FAQs to help the public understand the guidance, to respond to stakeholder questions, and to clarify how the guidance may apply in specific scenarios. These FAQs may be intermittently updated. The FAQs are not intended to take the place of the guidance, but rather to interpret, supplement and provide details of the guidance.

Faith Institutions

Q1: What is appropriate guidance for effective seating strategies, spacing, handshaking, physical distancing and physical contact within faith institutions?

A1: Except between members of the same household, handshaking, hugs and other physical contact between individuals are not allowed, as required by the Guidance for Faith Institutions. The best way to limit the spread of COVID-19 is to maintain a physical distance of at least six (6) feet from members outside your household. We understand this is very challenging in communities where physical contact and greetings are a part of the culture.

For seating, strategies to comply with distancing requirements may include removing chairs to increase spacing between household groups. For buildings with fixed seating arrangements such as pews, blocking off every other row or using tape to distinguish proper physical distancing is also an effective strategy.

Q2: Should any special precautions be taken for singing or other musical portions of our services?

A2: Singing in a choir has been associated with extensive spread of COVID-19, because vigorous singing is more likely to result in the expulsion of potentially infectious droplets from the throat. The playing of brass or woodwind instruments may pose similar risks. Masks, face shields or face coverings are required while singing and playing an instrument. Due to the risk of these types of performances, it is strongly recommended to consider the strategies listed below.
• Consider live-streaming the performance to attendees to limit the size of in-person gatherings.

• Consider physical distancing beyond the recommended six (6) feet apart and move performances outdoors.

• When playing brass and wind instruments, consider moving the performance outdoors and consider covering the instruments to keep droplets from spreading when using the instrument.

• Consider using amplifiers or other sound enhancing equipment to reduce the need to yell and increase the volume of the performers’ voices.

Q3: Are there recommendations for how to safely partake in communion elements?

A3: If communion is served, the person preparing communion prior to the service should wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds immediately before starting preparation.

• Communion ministers must wear a mask, face shield or face coverings while distributing communion. All ministers of communion should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol after masking and immediately before distributing communion.

• Ministers should try to avoid touching communicants’ hands while distributing communion.

• Use of a common communion cup is not recommended. Consider distributing communion in separate cups from a platter that provides enough space to allow communicants to select a cup without touching the others.

• Communicants should be advised to maintain at least six (6) feet of distance between themselves and others. Consider marking relevant areas on the floor to facilitate this practice.

Q4: Is there guidance on how buildings should be sanitized before and after events?

A4: Please refer to our general cleaning recommendation guidance here.

Q5: For faith institutions that have security personnel, will security be required to screen people for illness when services re-open? If so, who will be providing that training?

A5: Faith communities are not required to do screening. However, it is required to have signage that reminds people to stay home if they have been ill with COVID-related symptoms or if they are considered a part of a population that has been identified as particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

Q6: If services open back up, and vulnerable members (e.g. people with underlying conditions, etc.) refuse to stay away, what should we do?

A6: Encourage individuals who are considered more vulnerable to COVID-19 to stay home to participate in services, if possible. Consider recommending that more
vulnerable members use internet streaming services or video chats from home if they have access to these services. If individuals come to services, they must wear masks, face shields or face covering and ensure physical distancing is maintained at all times.

Q7: Where can we find guidance for children's gatherings, children's classes during services, camps, etc.?

A7: Faith institutions operating gatherings, classes or camps that are youth programs must follow the Statewide Youth Programs Guidance. This is required whether or not parents are on-site or not.

Faith institutions operating license-exempt child care for children from birth through 12 years of age when parents are on-site should review and follow the recommendations in the Health and Safety Guidance for Family, Friend, and Neighbor license exempt approved ODHS child care providers providing child care during COVID-19. These programs must comply with the Mask, Face Covering, Face Shield Guidance.

Children’s classes or other programs that may be considered child care must follow the child care guidance and be approved to operate as Emergency Child Care.

Q8: A “sacred space” is a sacred area set apart for a specific religious purpose, such as altars and temples. For communities where “sacred space” is important, what are the guidelines for allowing someone into that space for specific purposes? While gatherings may be out, what about more individual-based practices in communal spaces?

A8: We understand that each faith tradition is unique with many nuanced practices, rituals and ceremonies that don’t easily fit within the formal guidance provided. For these instances, it is still required to maintain physical distancing, practice regular hand washing, ensure regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces and require use of masks, face shields or face coverings. For more information on handwashing, face coverings and cleaning practices, please visit our website here.

Q9: If my faith community does not have a space to meet, are we allowed to rent out another space, like a restaurant, for our services?

A9: Yes, faith communities may use other spaces for services and must follow the Guidance for Faith Institutions. Faith institutions are strongly recommended to follow the recommended capacity limits in the Sector Risk Level Guidance Chart for the designated risk level for the county where the faith service is located. For example, if a faith community rents out a restaurant space, the faith community is prohibited from operating the restaurant and must use the space for faith services only.
Q10: What maximum capacity size limits and guidance should recovery meetings (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) that meet inside faith institutions follow?

A10: Recovery meetings that meet inside faith institutions are required to follow the requirements for community meetings outlined in the General Guidance for Employers and Organizations. For capacity limits and risk levels for counties, please refer to Sector Risk Level Guidance Chart.

Recovery meetings must comply with the Statewide Guidance for Masks, Face Coverings, Face Shields and ensure six (6) feet of distance is maintained between all attendees and staff.

Q11: If I have people in my home for faith purposes, such as a bible study or services, can I follow the maximum capacity limits for faith institutions?

A11: No. Gatherings at private residences are required to follow the at-home and social gatherings limits based on the designated risk level for the county where the gathering is held.

Q12: Are fraternal organizations considered faith institutions and therefore allowed to follow the maximum capacity limits for faith institutions?

A12: No. Fraternal organizations are not considered faith institutions. Gatherings at these organizations must comply with the social gathering limits based on the designated risk level for the county where the fraternal organization is located. In addition, fraternal organizations must comply with the Sector Guidance for Eating and Drinking Establishments if they serve food and beverage.

Q13: What guidance would weddings follow that take place in faith institutions?

A13: Weddings ceremonies that take place indoor or outdoor at a faith institution that are part of a religious service must comply with the Guidance for Faith Institutions, and faith institutions are strongly encouraged to follow the recommended capacity limits in the Sector Risk Level Guidance Chart for the designated risk level for the county where the faith service is located.

Wedding celebrations that are held inside are considered indoor entertainment and regardless of the indoor setting must comply with the Indoor Entertainment Establishments guidance for the designated risk level for the county where the wedding celebration is being held, including the capacity limits. A wedding celebration in an outside setting would have to follow the Outdoor Entertainment Establishments guidance for the designated risk level for the county where the wedding celebration is being held, including the capacity limits.

Q14: Is indoor recreation allowed in a faith institution, such as a church gym?

A14: Indoor recreation is allowed in a faith institution only in counties where indoor recreation is permitted under the designated risk level for the county. If allowed to operate based on the designated risk level for the county, gyms must comply with required capacity limits for indoor recreation and fitness establishments and comply
Q15: **What is the capacity limit for a wedding that is held at a private residence?**

**A15:** A wedding held at a private residence is considered a social or at-home gathering and are required to follow the social and at-home gatherings limits and guidance based on the designated risk level for the county where the at-home gathering is held.

Q16: **If family members or friends travel to Oregon from another state or country for my wedding, what is the requirement for them to quarantine?**

**A16:** Individuals traveling to Oregon from another state or country should review and follow the statewide travel recommendations, which apply to non-essential travel. Weddings are considered non-essential travel.

Q17: **What guidance should license-exempt child care programs (e.g. Sunday school) follow if parents are on-site for the duration of the program?**

**A17:** License-exempt child care for children from birth through 12 years of age when parents are onsite should review and follow the recommendations in the Health and Safety Guidance for Family, Friend, and Neighbor license exempt approved ODHS child care providers providing child care during COVID-19. Programs should refer to this guidance even if the program does not receive subsidies or is not located in a home.

Q18: **What guidance should faith-based children and youth programming follow if programs take place when parents are not on-site?**

**A18:** If a program meets the definition of a youth program in the youth program guidance, the program operator must adhere to the Youth Programs Guidance. These programs must comply with the Youth Programs Guidance whether parents are on-site or not.

Children’s classes or other programs that may be considered child care must follow the child care guidance and be approved to operate as Emergency Child Care.

**Funeral Homes, Mortuaries, Cemeteries**

Q1: **Should funerals that happen at private residences follow the Sector Guidance for Faith Institutions, Funeral Homes, Mortuaries and Cemeteries?**

**A1:** Funerals that take place at private residences are required to follow the Sector Guidance for Social and At-Home Gatherings. Funerals that take place at funeral homes, mortuaries or cemeteries must follow the Sector Guidance for Faith Institutions, Funeral Homes, Mortuaries and Cemeteries.
Q2: Are funeral homes and cemetery offices required to keep locations locked and open for appointment only, or can the doors be open to the general public?

A2: Funeral homes and cemetery offices are not required to keep doors closed to the public or open for appointment only, but they may choose to do so. At all times, funeral homes and cemetery offices must comply with the maximum capacity limits based on the designated risk level for the county where the funeral home or cemetery office is located.

Q3: If a family refuses to comply with these mandates and a large crowd starts to gather in a funeral home or cemetery parking lot, should we report this and if so, how?

A3: Any violation of EO 20-66 or OHA Guidance can be directed in a complaint to Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OR-OSHA). Additionally, if applicable, complaints can be sent to the Oregon Mortuary & Cemetery Board (OMCB).

Q4: Is capacity based off what the fire marshal assigns or is it a formula calculation based off of square footage and physical distancing requirements?

A4: Your general occupant load shall include both staff members and business customers. For additional assistance on how to determine what your business’s general occupant load is, prior to incorporating and determining what the COVID-19 “maximum capacity limit” is, please reach out to the local fire agency with jurisdiction in your area. To determine the required percentage maximum capacity limit based on the designated risk level for the county in which the business is located, please refer to the Sector Risk Level Guidance Chart.

Document accessibility: For individuals with disabilities or individuals who speak a language other than English, OHA can provide information in alternate formats such as translations, large print, or braille. Contact the Health Information Center at 1-971-673-2411, 711 TTY or COVID19.LanguageAccess@dhsoha.state.or.us.