

Phase III guidelines for religious and faith-based organizations

Phase III operations

Under Phase III of Rhode Island's reopening plan, religious and faith-based organizations will be able to continue in-person activity on a limited basis with restrictions in place to protect public health and safety.

- **General guidance:** Please review the general guidance document posted on www.reopeningri.com. This includes physical distancing requirements; required signage, including downloadable and printable posters; information on the use of face coverings, which are required to be worn at all times that 6-foot spacing cannot be easily, continuously, and measurably maintained; required screenings for entrants; information about testing, required access to cleaning materials, and hand hygiene; facility cleaning and disinfection procedures; and protocols to respond to cases of illness.
- **Guidance for all religious and faith-based organizations:**
 - The live streaming or broadcasting of services is strongly recommended as a safer alternative to in-person gatherings.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified groups at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including those over the age of 65.
 - Places of worship shall limit indoor occupancy to the lesser of 66% of the worship area's maximum permitted occupancy level or the number of persons who can maintain physical distance when seated – i.e. minimum of six feet of physical distance between households. Places of worship shall also limit occupancy to 125 people or fewer in accordance with a statewide rule for indoor places of assembly.
 - Choirs and musical ensembles should be limited. Individuals singing must be at least 14 feet apart from other choir/ensemble members and from other individuals.
 - All individuals who are not within the same household must adhere to physical distancing requirements at all times, indoors or outdoors, including 6 feet of spacing between persons.
 - Face coverings are required in accordance with Executive Order 20-30 and any renewal of that order. This includes those present for the recording of services.
 - Increasing ventilation by holding services outdoors or opening windows and doors is encouraged, when possible.
 - It is recommended that attendees be required to sanitize their hands upon entry to the space of worship.
 - Shared ceremonial materials are discouraged (e.g. holy water fonts must be emptied; prayer beads and other objects should not be shared). It is recommended that any religious scripture be projected electronically, provided via a disposable paper version, or carried in individually (personal version) rather than having any shared materials that must be cleaned between uses. If shared materials or objects are truly necessary, they should be sanitized between uses.
 - To facilitate required cleaning and sanitation, in accordance with the [general guidance documents](#) and [216-RICR-50-15-7](#), it is recommended to plan for sufficient time (e.g. a half-hour period) between each gathering to clean all frequently touched surfaces, including pews, doorknobs, religious scriptures, and artifacts, when applicable.
 - Collection plates or any other objects should not be passed. Collection/donation boxes should be placed in a fixed location (e.g. at the entrance) rather than holding collections

- during the service. Encourage people to use electronic payments or checks instead of cash, if possible.
- To ensure that in-person attendance remains at or below occupancy limits and that 6 feet of physical distancing can be maintained, places of worship are encouraged to have attendees sign up for services in advance through an electronic or telephonic system.
 - The development of entry and exit protocols that ensure physical distancing is recommended (e.g. signage or floor markings with one-way aisles, demarcations that show 6 feet physical distancing, and staff directing attendees in high-traffic areas).
 - Houses of worship should not host gatherings before or after services.
 - **Drive-in, stay-in-your-vehicle services:** Limited drive-in, stay-in-your-vehicle religious services are permitted. Drive-in services may be conducted under these conditions:
 - Attendees should remain inside their vehicles at all times. No one may exit a vehicle at any time, except to use the portable bathroom.
 - Attendees should not interact physically with clergy, staff, or participants in other vehicles.
 - Vehicles should contain only members of a single household. No neighbors or people outside of the same household should be in the same car.
 - Cars must be spaced the equivalent of every other parking spot or at least 6 feet apart.
 - Portable toilet facilities (“porta-johns”) and church restroom facilities may be used by attendees. Cleaning should occur as follows:
 - Thorough cleaning and sanitizing once per day.
 - High-touch areas (door handles, sinks or hand sanitizer dispensers, and toilets) wiped down frequently.
 - Cleaning wipes and/or cleaning materials available for individuals to clean surfaces before and after use.
 - **Outdoor services:** Outdoor services are permitted with capacity limited to the lesser of 66% capacity in the case of pre-existing outdoor facilities or the number of persons who can maintain physical distance when seated – i.e. minimum of six feet of physical distance between households. Places of worship shall also limit the number of attendees outdoors to 250 people or fewer in accordance with the statewide rule for outdoor places of assembly.
 - Services should follow all other requirements and physical distancing guidelines detailed herein. The use of masks and face coverings must adhere to the Department of Health regulations under [216-RICR-50-15-7](#) available at: reopeningri.com
 - **Thrift shops:** Thrift shops may be opened in accordance with [retail guidance](#) at reopeningri.com
 - **Communion or group rites and rituals:** As recommended by the CDC, religious leaders should decide whether to modify specific religious rites, rituals, and services, consulting with health officials as needed. Examples of specific preventive actions include:
 - Nodding, bowing, or waving instead of shaking hands, hugging, or kissing.
 - Avoiding holding hands during the service/prayers.
 - Considering modifying practices that are specific to particular faith traditions. For example, congregations that practice Communion could consider modifying or suspending this practice. Modifications could include:
 - Ensuring that religious leaders always wash their hands or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol prior to conducting the service and Communion.
 - Placing the Communion elements in the recipient’s hand, not on their tongue, and avoiding use of a common cup. (If there is contact, the individual distributing Communion elements should sanitize their hands before continuing the service).