

Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Community Gathering Facilities Offering the Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging Programs

The Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) is committed to empowering Rhode Islanders to age strong. OHA's core constituency is people age 55 or older and adults living with a disability. Due to the greater risk for complications from COVID-19 infection among these groups, OHA is taking every precaution to prevent the spread of the disease and has compiled the following guidance, in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), to assist its partners in supporting this end.

This guidance is intended to help community gathering facilities, such as senior centers and community meal sites, make more informed decisions about COVID-19-related reopening plans, with the goal to minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure to staff, participants, and volunteers – and to contain the spread of the virus. OHA does not regulate these facilities. As such, reopening decisions should be made in line with local policies and decision-making protocols, bearing the below guidance in mind. Understanding that those who are older or have underlying health conditions are most vulnerable during this pandemic, we recommend these guidelines are followed to the greatest extent possible.

The goal is for facilities to initially implement plans that have the lowest possible risk. For instance, all other factors being equal and with appropriate health and safety protections in place, an activity that is outdoors would pose less risk than one that takes place indoors.

Phase III ([Executive Order 20-50](#)) began June 30, 2020. The total number of people allowed to gather at one time increased, and most businesses are reopening with new guidelines. Rhode Islanders are living while physically distancing and wearing cloth face coverings. Travel and other restrictions continue in order to keep Rhode Islanders safe and healthy.

Overarching Tasks and Policies

Recommended:

- Evaluate current policies to see if any changes or modifications need to occur in an effort to follow the below guidelines.
- Finalize any policies and procedures in relation to reopening, including, but not limited to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements, actions related to non-adherence to guidelines, limitation on shared items (books, puzzles, etc.), establishment of smaller group activities, and offering lower risk activities.
- Determine your specific needs and begin procurement of needed materials and supplies for reopening.
- Educate and train your staff about your plan and prepare information for dissemination to the public.

Required:

- Complete a COVID-19 Control Plan (available on Reopening RI's website in [English](#) or in [Spanish](#)).

REOPENING RI

Physical space and occupancy limits

Specific guidance for community gathering facilities offering OHA programs:

- Maintain six feet between all persons at all times. Post signage to remind people of physical distancing.
- Consider your space capacity. What is being suggested for houses of worship is to limit occupancy to 66% of the worship area's maximum permitted occupancy level; indoor dining is limited to 66% of capacity and other restrictions including physical distancing. [RIDOH regulations for all covered entities](#) are posted on RIDOH's website.
- Cancel or postpone special events, such as festivals, holiday events, and special performances.
- Do not allow outside groups to use the facility, at this time.
- Have one separate entrance and exit.
- Consider staggering reopening with participants arriving and leaving at different times of the day or dividing participants into two groups that rotate attendance every other day.

All organizations must follow the general guidance from RIDOH and any applicable Executive Orders, including those related to gathering sizes and physical distancing.

Adhere to gathering size restrictions

- RIDOH has published [requirements regarding gathering sizes](#), and they are posted on the RIDOH website. This guidance should be followed when holding meetings, conferences, or other social gatherings.
- Follow the gathering size limits for each phase. The entire [Reopening RI Plan](#) is posted online.
- When offering community meal and/or dining services, follow the [US Administration for Community Living's reopening guidelines for senior nutrition programs](#).
 - Implement communal dining practices such as those issued for Assisted Living Residences:
 - Dining room staff and volunteers must always wear masks or cloth face coverings.
 - Ensure physical distancing is maintained:
 - Limit number of participants per table (e.g. a table that usually accommodates four people should be limited to two people).
 - Tables must be spaced at least eight feet apart, allowing two feet for the moving of chairs while maintaining a physical distance of six feet.
 - Keep the same participants seated at the same table each day, so that each participant is in contact with the same small group.
 - Meals should be served restaurant style (individual servings/no buffet).
 - The sharing of condiments and serving utensils is discouraged.
 - Clean high-touch surfaces (e.g. chairs, tables) between seatings.
 - Ensure that processes are in place to prevent staff from cleaning used tableware (e.g. plates and cups) and then serving food. Consider the following steps:
 - Refrain from removing used plates and tableware from the table until all participants have finished eating.
 - Use specific staff to serve participants and refill drinks during the meals and a separate group of staff to clear plates and tableware from those who are finished.
 - Plates can be ceramic, provided strategies are in place that can reduce the movement of used dishware. Disposable dishes and utensils are acceptable.
- When offering physical fitness classes, follow the [guidance for gyms and fitness centers](#).



REOPENING RI

Apply social distancing measures

Follow the CDC's [social distancing guidance](#). All people should remain at least six feet apart at all times.

Promote physical distancing (at least six feet between all individuals)

- Implement steps to support physical distancing, such as repositioning furniture, mapping spacing on the floor with tape or other marking products and providing other visual signals.

Activities should be conducted in groups of five or fewer. Maintain stable groups for activities so that each participant is in contact with the same group, including the same staff.

Business processes, procedures, and activities

All community gathering facilities must have established cleaning, health screening, and program delivery procedures.

Enhanced cleaning and/or disinfecting procedures

- RIDOH requires at least twice-daily cleanings in settings with regular traffic, or between multi-group use in accordance with CDC guidelines and as [described in 216-RICR-50-15-7](#). Restrooms, commonly touched surfaces (shared workstations, elevator buttons, door handles and railings), and public use areas shall be cleaned at least once every four hours, and it is recommended to provide for individual sanitizing wipes.
- Specific to restrooms:
 - Make adjustments to promote physical distancing within restrooms (only use every other stall, sink, etc.), or take other steps as is practicable (including the posting of signage).
 - Clean commonly touched surfaces in restrooms (toilet seats, doorknobs, stall handles, sinks, paper towel/soap dispensers) with increased frequency in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- RIDOH requires that employers ensure that employees, customers, and visitors have access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol at all times.
- Allow time for cleaning between activities.
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols should go beyond current measures.

Screening procedures

- RIDOH requires establishing, at minimum, symptom-monitoring procedures to screen all individuals entering a building or other workplace. People whose responses to screening questions indicate they are sick, or who show visible signs of illness, must be denied entrance and instructed to isolate.
 - Employers may also choose to supplement screening questions with temperature checks. CDC has posted [guidance on temperature checks](#) on its website.
 - RIDOH advises that an elevated temperature is 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.
- Anyone showing signs of illness of any kind or who may have been exposed to COVID-19 should not be in the community facility.
- Post a sign that states individuals (staff, participants, volunteers, etc.) who have fever, cough, or any sign of sickness should not enter the facility.
- Ensure that all staff are trained, especially in regard to recognizing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Ensure policies and expectations are communicated to both internal and external individuals and other community partners.
- There is a standardized COVID-19 Screening Tool available on Reopening RI in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#).



REOPENING RI

Arrival/Drop-off procedure

- Designate one entrance and assign staff or a volunteer, as applicable, to greet and screen participants. The staff or volunteer should not be a person at higher risk for severe COVID-19.
- Conduct daily health screening at the designated entrance on all individuals entering the building.
- After ensuring the participant, staff, or volunteer does not have any symptoms, have the person use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol or wash hands for 20 seconds before full entry into the facility.
- When possible, operate with contactless entry: no signing-in or card swiping. If not possible, there must be a way to disinfect the writing implement or swipe card and machine between uses.
- If a person displays symptoms upon arrival or while at the facility, they must be sent home until cleared. If a participant develops any COVID-19 symptoms while at the program, staff should separate the person in the treatment room or quiet space away from other people. Staff should then call the participant's caregiver, if applicable, to inform them that their loved one is displaying symptoms and needs to be picked up from the program and taken home as soon as possible.
- Staff should monitor and discourage congregation at the arrival/drop-off area.
- If your facility provides transport to or from your location, please refer to the transportation guidance available on Reopening RI for [buses](#) and [cars/vans](#).

NOTE: If your program contracts for transportation with other entities to bring participants and/or volunteers to and from the program, you should check with these companies about their protocol for COVID-19 and then share that information with participants, volunteers, and staff.

Face masks and other PPE

- Staff, participants, and volunteers are required to wear face coverings unless the individual(s) can easily, continuously, and measurably maintain at least six feet of distance from others for the duration of their work and/or time in a building, pursuant to [Executive Order 20-04](#).
- Posters notifying anyone entering the facility of the requirement to wear a facemask are available on RIDOH's website in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#).
- Such protective coverings are not required for:
 - Anyone for whom use of such protective covering would be damaging to their health; or
 - When a face covering would inhibit an activity of daily living (e.g., eating).
- It is recommended that a facility keep, at minimum, a 15-day supply of PPE.
- PPE should not be shared by or between staff, participants, and volunteers.
- Provide several places throughout the building to wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Train participants, employees, and volunteers in proper hand-hygiene practices.

Clear communications plan

- Develop a communications plan to explain the aspects of the reopening of operations to staff, participants, volunteers, and other target audiences (e.g., businesses) as appropriate.
- Determine appropriate materials and channels for communicating information. Examples include:
 - Developing and disseminating a one-page fact sheet;
 - Posting information and FAQs to your website;
 - Sharing information on social media;
 - Distributing information via municipal robo-call; and/or
 - Developing and sharing screening tools and signage for public buildings and businesses.
- Translate information into the languages most frequently spoken in your community.
- Continue to emphasize the importance of participants and employees staying home if they are sick.

REOPENING RI

Human Resources

[Guidance to minimize spread of COVID-19 among employees](#)

Each organization should have a plan that ensures anyone entering the facility, including employees, are subjected to daily health screenings. The plan should also detail how staff will maintain physical distance from each other and program participants. All efforts should be made to maintain a consistent work crew to reduce unnecessary exposure to multiple people.

Asymptomatic testing (testing for people without COVID-19 symptoms) is available to Rhode Islanders, and is focused on densely populated areas hardest hit by the pandemic. This testing is available for free at either Rhode Island College or the Community College of Rhode Island (Warwick campus) to those who work in close-contact environments. Visit the RIDOH's website to [learn about these options and schedule a test](#).

[Guidelines to assist individuals who are symptomatic and/or test positive for COVID-19, or are required to quarantine based on potential exposure](#)

Each facility should have a plan to ensure that employees who are required to isolate based on a positive test for COVID-19 or are required to quarantine as a result of exposure, can safely stay out of the workplace until cleared to return. The Point Healthy Aging Helpdesk is available at 401-462-4444 to assist anyone in need of supports during quarantine or isolation.

[Training plan in order to meet the safety guidelines proposed in the previous sections](#)

Each organization should develop a training plan to ensure that employees are able to meet the safety guidelines described throughout this guidance document.

Supplies

Each facility should develop a plan for obtaining and maintaining any additional supplies needed to safely operate upon reopening for in-person programs and services. Supplies likely needed for Phase III include:

- Face masks (cloth or surgical face masks are acceptable).
- EPA-approved disinfectant solutions or other general cleaning supplies (spray bottles, bleach, surface cleaners, etc.).
- Materials for hand washing stations (soap and water) and/or hand sanitizer bottles, containing at least 60% alcohol, at workstations.

[Suggested:](#)

- Hand sanitizers and hand sanitizer stations that are accessible to the public.
- Disinfectant wipe stations near communal objects.

Financing

OHA Rhode Island State Designated Grant recipients are able to repurpose their SFY2020 general revenue funding for COVID-19 related expenses. Please contact OHA at 401-462-3000 for more details.

Additional Resources

- [Senior Centers Connect Guide](#)
- [National Council on Aging's Guidance for Resuming On-Site Senior Center Operations](#)
- [US Administration for Community Living's COVID-19 page](#)
- RIDOH's [COVID-19 section](#)

