

Covid Safety Plan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Glenside, PA
As of April 22, 2022

COVID's call to care for one another

Dear friends,

COVID-19 has been many things to us in nearly two and a half years: health threat, wily opponent, task master, change agent. In many ways it has also been a teacher, giving us lesson after lesson on what it means to take care of one another, to protect the common good, to rely on reputable information, and to come out of crisis wiser and more resilient—all while learning to pivot, adapt and change. These are all good lessons because they call on us to apply values that are at the heart of our faith in Christ.

This COVID-19 Safety Plan is an effort to capture the various factors and actions that will help us protect one another in the many twists and turns that this health crisis takes. It acknowledges that at some points we will be at greater levels of threat and risk, and at other times less. It seeks to provide some consistency in our responses and the nimbleness to change direction when need be. It acknowledges that there is some response that we'll be growing into over time.

I am particularly grateful to the COVID 19 Advisory Committee: Nancy Ironside, Ken Rose, John Olson and Ellen Dekalb, who have brought to this conversation extensive experience with COVID response in areas of government policy, biology, education and child care.

As we continue to adapt and respond to COVID's wily ways, we will likely adapt this plan as well. Your experiences, concerns and feedback also make this a living document, as we are called to new practices of care. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me and the wardens to keep the conversation going. Our contact information is at the end of this document.

Warmly,

The Rev. Barbara Ballenger

Interim Priest in Charge

Introduction

This COVID-19 Safety Plan (“Plan”) lays out St. Peter’s strategy for maximizing congregant safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, while allowing for the return of practices important for the life of the church. St. Peter’s, and the Covid Advisory Committee (Committee), are committed to updating the Plan consistent with the best public health practices, guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and rules and/or guidance from the Montgomery County Health Department, such as:

- [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#)

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Peter’s has consistently followed federal guidance, including information provided by the CDC and other public health agencies, as well as guidance from the Diocese of Pennsylvania into its decision-making to protect the health and safety of our parishioners. The Plan was developed after consideration of the results of the parish Covid survey, which had a 47 percent response rate, and robust discussion amongst the Vestry that included dissenting opinions and a focus on providing all our members with access to liturgy and parish life to the greatest extent possible. It will continue to be reviewed and modified as necessary to adapt to the changing situations created by Covid-19.

Applicability

The Plan applies to all St. Peter’s facilities -- sanctuary, parish hall, and common spaces. Mask requirements, symptom monitoring, and all health and safety procedures and protocols apply to everyone using St. Peter’s facilities. This includes parishioners, visitors, and renters of our space. The Plan is based on the most recent CDC guidelines and will be adjusted as guidelines are updated and new information becomes available.

COVID-19 Advisory Committee

St. Peter’s Vestry has established a COVID-19 Advisory Committee (Committee) responsible for monitoring Montgomery County’s risk status (according to the CDC’s [Covid Data Tracker](#)), reviewing and monitoring the COVID-19 safety plans and protocols of local governmental organizations (e.g. – Abington School District and Cheltenham School District), offering guidance on Covid practices, and suggesting when to tighten or ease protocols. The Committee is responsible for ensuring that the Vestry and Rector (or Interim Priest-in-Charge) are apprised of the Plan contents and that policies and practices are in line with CDC and other guidance.

Members of the Team include (as of April 22, 2022):

- Two Vestry representatives – Nancy Ironside and Ken Rose
- Rector or Interim Priest-in-Charge – Rev. Barbara Ballanger
- Two representatives from the Congregation – John Olson and Ellen Dekalb

Levels of Community Transmission

The CDC has created a new tools, the [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#) and the [COVID-19 by County | CDC](#) to help evaluate Covid-19 risk and recommend prevention measures based on the level of risk.

Levels can be low, medium, or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area. Take precautions to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 based on the COVID-19 Community Level in your area. The following precautions, provided by the CDC, should be taken at each risk level:

| Low | Medium | High |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines Get tested if you have symptoms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines Get tested if you have symptoms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wear a mask indoors in public Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines Get tested if you have symptoms Additional precautions may be needed for people at high risk for severe illness |

People may choose to mask at any time. People with [symptoms, a positive test, or exposure](#) to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask. Masks are required on [public transportation](#) and may be required in other places by local or state authorities.

If you are immunocompromised or high risk for severe disease, learn more about [how to protect yourself](#) with additional CDC recommendations for each COVID-19 Community Level.

The Montgomery County Office of Public Health aligns with the [CDC guidelines](#) and recommends that Health officials and individuals should consider current information about COVID-19 hospitalizations in the community, as well as the potential for strain on the local health system and COVID-19 cases in the community, when making decisions about community prevention strategies and individual behaviors. Communities and individuals should also make decisions based on whether they are at [high risk](#) for severe disease and take into account inequities in access to prevention strategies. Information on county transmission levels is available on the [Montgomery County COVID-19 HUB](#).

Those who can be fully vaccinated and boosted, should do so, as per CDC guidelines. People who are [up to date on vaccines](#) have much lower risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 compared with unvaccinated people. For more information on individual and community-level Covid-19 prevention, please go to [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#), specifically the section on “Covid-19 Community Level and Covid-19 Prevention.”

If the Covid-19 Community Level for Montgomery County increases to the Medium or High level, St. Peter’s will, conditions permitting, consider moving some or all of worship services outside.

If St. Peter’s experiences a Covid-19 outbreak, the Vestry may consider moving up the risk level scale even if there is no change in the Community Level for Montgomery County.

Face Masks

Wearing a [mask](#), in conjunction with physical distancing, can slow the spread of COVID-19 and remains a critical step in protecting those around you. All individuals who are not fully vaccinated should wear a mask regardless of community transmission level. If one chooses to wear a mask or is required to do so based on the Community Level, N95 and KN95 masks remain the most protective, followed by disposable surgical/medical masks, and then cloth masks. Mask requirements at St. Peter's will depend on the risk level for Montgomery County as indicated by the [Covid Data Tracker](#).

- **Low Risk:** masks will be optional. Unvaccinated parishioners and visitors are strongly encouraged to wear masks while in St. Peter's facilities. Fully vaccinated individuals may choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission for a variety of reasons.
- **Moderate Risk:** masks will be strongly encouraged for all parishioners and visitors, and mandatory for unvaccinated parishioners and visitors. Fully vaccinated individuals may choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission for a variety of reasons.
- **High Risk:** masks will be mandatory for ALL parishioners and visitors regardless of vaccination status.

See the CDC [guidance](#) on types of masks individuals can use to protect themselves and others from getting and spreading COVID-19. The Church will have available non-medical disposable masks for people entering its facilities.

Leaders of St. Peter's organizations and committees (e.g. – choir) may, at their discretion, implement mask requirements more stringent than those generally in effect for St. Peter's. Organizations may not have rules less stringent than current St. Peter's rules.

Physical Distancing

St. Peter's will follow CDC guidance on physical distancing. Currently, physical distancing is not required for those who are fully vaccinated.

Signage

St. Peter's will have signage at all entrances and throughout its facilities with reminders of the mask requirement, as applicable. Signage will be posted at entrances and in high traffic areas throughout buildings to encourage/facilitate physical distancing in common areas throughout the buildings.

Signage will be continuously evaluated and augmented as needed.

Contact Tracing

St. Peter's will endeavor to conduct contact tracing for exposures related to St. Peter's events (e.g. – worship, fellowship, committee meetings, choir practice, etc.). Every effort will be made to quickly notify people when a case is identified, and to encourage COVID-19 affected individuals to report their status to local public health departments during their period of transmission. If you test positive for Covid after attending worship or another St. Peter's event/meeting, please contact **the Rector/Priest-in-Charge and the Senior Warden** as soon as possible. **The Rector/Priest-in-Charge or Senior Warden** will then contact the committee chair or other leader of the event so that they may inform all attendees of the possible exposure. Names of the infected individual will NOT be shared with committee chairs for

the sake of privacy; they will only be informed that someone has tested positive and that they should contact everyone else who was at the meeting. If someone reports an infection after attending worship services, **the Rector/Priest-in-Charge or Senior Warden** will email the congregation to notify them of the positive case so that anyone who attended services on the date in question may decide if they want to be tested.

Symptom Monitoring

Our goal is to protect the health and safety of all parishioners and visitors to St. Peter's. If you have been exposed to COVID or have symptoms of a contagious illness, do wear a mask, keep distance, use hand sanitizer, and stay home. Alternate means of being present and engaged in worship and meetings are available thanks to our Tech Team, Facebook live streaming, Zoom, and other platforms. If you have any doubts as to whether you might have Covid-19, please take an at home test prior to coming to church.

Environmental Cleaning

St. Peter's facilities are cleaned regularly. All products used for cleaning/disinfecting comply with CDC cleaning requirements.

In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in St. Peter's facilities, enhanced environmental cleaning of the spaces that the individual occupied or accessed will take place in accordance with CDC guidance, which provides as follows:

- If less than 24 hours have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, clean and disinfect the space.
- If more than 24 hours have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, cleaning is enough.
- If more than 3 days have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning practices) is needed.

If enhanced cleaning is required, custodial services will wait as long as possible (at least several hours) before cleaning and disinfecting to increase the opportunity for viral deactivation to occur naturally, while also allowing time for aerosols to settle, prior to surface disinfection.

Hygiene

Hand sanitizer is available throughout St. Peter's facilities, including the sanctuary, hallways, narthex, bathrooms, and parish hall. Use of hand sanitizer is encouraged before and after receiving Eucharist. People are encouraged to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds multiple times a day to eliminate any virus they might have come in contact with.

Best practice encourages covering mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze (or use the inside of your elbow) and immediately throw used tissues in the trash. Wash hands thoroughly afterward.

Ventilation and Air Filtration

An important approach to lowering the concentrations of indoor air pollutants or contaminants, including any viruses that may be in the air, is to increase ventilation – the amount of outdoor air coming indoors. Using a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system to ensure proper ventilation with outside air can help reduce the concentration of airborne contaminants, including viruses, indoors. The degree to which outdoor air can be brought into any building varies depending on the age and capacity of its HVAC systems. Air handling units should be outfitted with the highest efficiency level of filtration that does not significantly diminish air flow using the existing filter rack, fan, and other limiting factors of the air handling units. The filters should be well sealed to ensure that air cannot bypass them.

St. Peter's leadership will investigate options related to improving air flow and/or filtration in the existing HVAC system, and will also consider whether portable air purifiers would be practicable in the sanctuary and other spaces such as the parish hall.

In temperate weather conditions, windows will be opened in the sanctuary and parish hall to allow for increased air exchange in the space. The ceiling fans in the sanctuary will also be used to encourage the flow of air. The Rector/Priest-in-Charge and the worship committee will also consider outdoor services or hybrid inside/outside services in good weather.

Care for the very young

As of this date, vaccinations are not yet available for our youngest members, who gather for Godly Play sessions in a classroom each Sunday. The Godly Play program takes the following precautions to keep unvaccinated children safe: mandatory masking, social distancing, air filters and open windows. Two Germ Guardian Air Purifiers have been installed in the Godly Play Room. They incorporate CADR True HEPA Filters along with UV light sanitizers to filter and clean the air, circulating the air in the room through the filters every ten minutes.

When Clergy can't perform the liturgy

If exposed to COVID or exhibiting symptoms, clergy and staff will follow CDC guidelines for testing, masking, isolation and quarantine.

Even a light case of COVID requires a quarantine of at least five days, so it's very possible that Sunday liturgy might be affected if both clergy catch the virus at the same time or aren't available to back one another up. Clergy will use the following options to keep the liturgy running smoothly:

- Seek a supply priest to lead the service.
- If no clergy are available, a parishioner will be asked to lead Morning Prayer.
- If possible, record sermon in advance or patch the preacher in on a live feed.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding the Plan, please contact the Rector/Priest-in-Charge or one of the Wardens.

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