

COVID RESPONSE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGREGATIONS

Updated November 30, 2022

The COVID Response Team (which is renamed the Diocesan Health & Safety Committee) has reviewed and, with Bishop Marc's approval, now recommends the following updated COVID-safe and other respiratory disease-safe guidelines based on the latest information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). These recommendations take into consideration the increased seasonal outbreaks of highly-contagious influenza, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus, which can infect children under 2 and some susceptible adults), and the newer Omicron subvariants of COVID-19.

1. We ask that congregations strongly encourage all persons to wear masks indoors during worship; while congregational singing; and while in Sunday School, Bible Study, Vestry meetings, Coffee Hour, attending other indoor activities, etc.

- Depending on individuals' preferences, masks may be removed by fully-vaccinated and recently-boosted persons, who are socially distanced from others outside of their "pod" and are in well-ventilated areas.
- Masks may be removed by altar party members while reading or preaching, if they are vaccinated and socially distanced from the nearest worshippers.
- Masks may be removed by choir members while singing together, if masking guidelines from state or local public health agencies allow mask removal. Even so, unmasked choir members should be up-to-date with their COVID vaccinations, more than six feet away from the nearest worshippers, and performing in a well-ventilated area. Regardless, singers can choose to wear masks for self-care.
- Celebrants can be unmasked while presiding at an altar and consecrating the elements and are recommended to be masked while distributing communion.
- Masks may be removed momentarily while consuming the blessed bread and wine during communion.
- Congregations may want to provide surgical masks and hand sanitizers at door entries and other places indoors where people gather.
- While masking outdoors is optional, wearing masks outdoors in large crowds are always a safe bet

2. Congregations should inform those entering their indoor spaces that (1) if they feel at all unwell, they should go home and isolate; and (2) if they test positive and/or come down with COVID symptoms after attending worship or other church activity, they should notify the church as soon as possible.

3. We strongly encourage congregations to continue to have good air circulation in indoor spaces by opening windows and doors and/or use effective air purifiers suitable for the indoor space size.

5. Congregations are encouraged to urge their members to get vaccinated and to get booster shots. This is especially recommended for persons over 50 years old, those who are pregnant, and those who are 5 years or older who are immunocompromised. Getting vaccinated is the best protection against being infected by

influenza, pneumonia, or the COVID virus and its subvariants. Plus, vaccinations and boosters minimize symptom severity if one becomes infected.

- The FDA has authorized/cleared boosters that target Omicron subvariants for those 5 years old and over. Contact your health care provider or local pharmacy to receive a booster.
- Children between 5-12 years old are eligible to receive COVID bi-variant boosters. And children between 6 months to 5 years are eligible to receive the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine shots. (NOTE: A vaccine for RSV is in development.)
- In addition, the CDC has authorized use of the Novavax vaccine. Unlike the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, Novavax is a traditional form of vaccine using nanoparticles made up of proteins from the surface of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

6. Congregations are encouraged to urge their members to take COVID antigen rapid tests if they are experiencing symptoms or before attending large holiday worship services or before taking an extended trip out of the local area.

7. If congregations wish to distribute blessed wine for Holy Communion, they may use a common cup. (NOTE: Grace Cathedral will resume offering the common cup in January, after their eucharistic ministers receive special instructions).

- It is assumed that a communicant will refrain from using the common cup if they feel uncomfortable about safety or if they feel unwell.
- Intinction is not recommended.
- Some congregations use individual paper cups to distribute blessed wine. And some congregations use the pre-packaged bread and wine from a church supply vendor (e.g., <https://www.concordiasupply.com/Church-Supplies/Communion-Supplies>)

We at DioCal trust the science and wish all to be well and safe whenever we gather together as the Beloved Community. For any questions regarding the foregoing, contact the Diocesan Health & Safety Committee, care of The Rev. Canon Debbie Low-Skinner at dskinner@diocal.org.