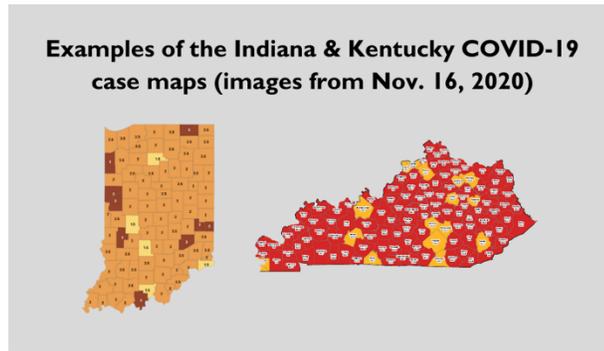


IKC guidance to congregations for Healthy Continuity of Ministry and Mission during the COVID-19 Pandemic – updated Nov 17, 2020

Summary

- ⇒ Keep doing virtual worship and ministry if this is what you have been doing
- ⇒ Switch to virtual or outdoor worship if your county is scored orange or red (colors according to your state’s COVID case mapping, see links below)
- ⇒ Suspend all indoor gatherings of any size until your county is scored blue/green or yellow
- ⇒ If you must have an indoor gathering, limit the number of people to no more than 10
- ⇒ Suspend 1:1 visitations with pastors until your county is scored blue/green or yellow



INDIANA CASE MAP LINK: IN county scores <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/2393.htm>

KENTUCKY CASE MAP LINK: KY county scores <https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19>

Whenever two or more do gather:

Wear a face mask

Stay at least 6 feet apart

Do not attend if you feel ill, even if it is just mildly ill

Do not attend if you have been tested for COVID and are still waiting for a result

Do not attend if you have tested positive for COVID in the last 14 days

Do not attend if you have been in close contact with someone that has tested positive or had symptoms in the last 14 days unless you have tested negative.

Guidance – What to Know

COVID-19 is spreading rapidly through all parts of Indiana and Kentucky. Health care systems are becoming heavily burdened. Many people are dying. Survivors are often finding themselves dealing with long-term effects that steal their health and ability to fully participate in life as they once did. Treatment options and a vaccine are still being developed, giving hope, but will not be able to reduce the spread or the burden significantly until sometime well into 2021.

Public health officials have identified small social gatherings as a significant source of the disease spread. They have found that **small** gatherings of people for events such as weddings, funerals, birthday parties,

family events, and even church gatherings are driving the spread of COVID-19. New information has been released that shows that 15 minutes of exposure to an infected individual, or even 15 minutes of **accumulated** exposure over the course of a day to multiple infected individuals, is considered a close contact and therefore has the potential for you becoming infected and sick with COVID-19.

The most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to stay distant from other people. If you will be around other people, wear a face mask and have it cover both your nose and mouth. Wash your hands frequently and otherwise practice good personal hygiene. Meeting with people outdoors is safer than meeting indoors due to outdoor air and wind being more likely to disperse and dispel respiratory droplets that carry the virus through the air from an infected person to others around them.

Know your congregation. Know your community. Know the local COVID-19 public health guidance and check it every week. Your congregation and your community and how it is impacted by COVID-19 in your area may change rapidly – you will need to monitor all of this frequently and have a plan to adjust as conditions change. We hope that this guidance helps you find balance between virtual and in-person gatherings to ensure both physical and spiritual health as you pursue continuity of Ministry and Mission for your congregation and your community. Both virtual and in-person opportunities, when done under safe conditions, for ministry and mission can be an appropriate way to find balance, stay safe, safeguarded, and provide for both physical and spiritual health.

Personal interactions with Pastors

Pastors need and want to be with people and to offer pastoral care and spiritual care whenever it is needed. Many pastors serving congregations in the IKC are also in need of care and consideration when it comes to their vulnerability to contracting COVID-19. Many pastors of the IKC are in a high-risk category. Pastors everywhere have contracted COVID-19, some have experienced serious illness and some have died. The IKC is recommending, for the sake of caring for every pastor, that 1:1 and/or other small groups meeting in-person with the pastor be limited to only the most urgent of situations, be limited to only those times when the community spread in the county is scored blue/green or yellow, and be done only with appropriate safeguards such as wearing a face mask, staying distant, practicing good personal hygiene, and if possible, to be done outdoors.

Congregational considerations

If your congregation is doing well with a virtual, on-line approach to ministry → keep going! This is a safe way to ensure continuity with potentially changing conditions and it prevents your church from being a source of COVID-19 transmission and contraction. Continuing ministry and mission virtually and on-line:

- Provides protection for those who are most vulnerable to severe COVID-19 disease
- Is a robust way to navigate a scenario if the local community conditions worsen with COVID-19
- Can make it hard for some to connect or to be spiritually nourished. Check the IKC website for resources to help you with spiritual formation practices to help you with virtual ministry.

If your congregation is already gathering for in-person worship or other in-person events → have an agreed plan for what conditions in your community will cause you to either stop in-person gatherings or to modify how you gather in-person. Gathering in person is an opportunity many people crave to provide their spiritual nourishment. Meeting this need should be done only when the community conditions related to COVID-19 and the safeguards established by the congregation are such that both

the physical and mental health of the congregation will be safeguarded. and it can be done in a manner that reduces the risk of people transmitting and/or contracting COVID-19. To keep congregants and worship staff at a low risk of contracting COVID-19, we recommend the following:

Congregations based in Indiana

The state of Indiana has developed a county-level color-coded and numerical scoring system based on weekly per capita cases (#cases per 100,000 people) and percent positivity rates. This system provides a readily available means to understand the extent of community spread and testing in your county. The scores and dashboard are available at <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/2393.htm>. The county scores are updated weekly on Wednesdays and are divided into four color-coded and numerical categories. The lower the score, the better the conditions are in the county. A blue color-coded county is the best score and indicates relatively low levels of COVID-19 spread. A red color-coded county is the worst score and indicates high levels of COVID-19 spread.

The IKC Board of Directors and staff recommend that if your congregation is based in or draws a significant number of people from a county that is coded orange or red, that you suspend in-person worship and preferably suspend all in-person meetings or gatherings. If you must have an in-person meeting or gathering, consider having the event in an outdoor venue or with no more than 10 people indoors, while also utilizing common safeguards of a facial covering, maintaining physical distance between people of 6 feet or more, and scrupulous attention to cleaning and personal hygiene with an emphasis on frequent hand-washing. The IKC recommends that the suspension of in-person worship and the restrictions on other in-person gatherings be kept in place until your county's score is either blue or yellow for at least three sequential weeks.

We also recommend using the Event Risk Assessment tool (see the section on this below) with our recommended criteria.

Congregations based in Kentucky

The state of Kentucky has developed a county-level color-coded scoring system based on daily per capita cases (#cases per 100,000 people) and available at <https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19>. The scoring system in Kentucky does not, like Indiana, utilize positivity rates as part of the scoring. The system provides a readily available means to understand the extent of community spread per county. The county scores are updated weekly on Thursdays and are divided into four color-coded categories. A green county has the lowest rates of COVID cases per capita. A red county has the highest rates of COVID cases per capita.

The IKC Board of Directors and staff recommend that if your congregation is based in or draws a significant number of people from a county that is coded orange or red, that you suspend in-person worship and preferably suspend all in-person meetings or gatherings. If you must have an in-person meeting or gathering, consider having the event in an outdoor venue or with no more than 10 people indoors, while also utilizing common safeguards of a facial covering, maintaining physical distance between people of 6 feet or more, and scrupulous attention to cleaning and personal hygiene with an emphasis on frequent hand-washing. The IKC recommends that the suspension of in-person worship and the restrictions on other in-person gatherings be kept in place until your county's score is either green or yellow for at least three sequential weeks.

We also recommend using the Event Risk Assessment tool (see the section on this below) with our recommended criteria.

Indiana and Kentucky – Event Risk Assessment

Additional information about the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 at any in-person gathering is also available from an event risk assessment tool developed by Georgia Tech University and is available at <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>. This tool allows you to assess the percent risk of at least one person being COVID-19 positive at an event in your county. The tool is designed to allow you to enter the number of people expected at the event, ranging from 10 to 5000. The tool also allows you to choose a parameter called the “ascertainment bias” with a choice of either 5 or 10. For the IKC we recommend choosing an ascertainment bias value of 10. This parameter is based on the expected ratio of tested positive cases to un-tested positive cases in your area. The IKC recommends using the value of 10 based on data that has been developed through the Richard M. Fairbanks Public School of Health COVID study and other data released about the rate of untested positive COVID cases.

The IKC Board of Directors is recommending to congregations and as part of our Employee and Volunteer Safety plan to use this tool for any event where 10 or more people will be gathered in-person regardless of what other safeguards are in place and regardless of your county’s COVID score. We also recommend that no in-person event be held unless the risk evaluation from this tool shows the risk is less than or equal to 25% with an ascertainment value of 10. This translates to a less than or equal to a 25% risk that at least one person at the event in your county will be COVID-19 positive at the time of the event.

Safeguard reminders

Please be reminded of the following as safeguards whenever you hold in-person gatherings, especially for indoor venues.

- First and foremost, actively encourage and expect anyone who does not feel well to stay home.
- Check local COVID-19 conditions routinely and be prepared to cancel a gathering if conditions worsen
- Be prepared to suspend in-person gatherings if someone is diagnosed with COVID-19 and be prepared to communicate with staff, members, and public health authorities to assist with contact tracing
- Have people keep distance between household family units all the way from the parking lot through building entry, worship, and exiting back to the parking lot.
- Ask people to wash their hands before arriving to church
- Ask people to wear facial coverings whenever they are with a group of people.
- Do not sing – neither the choir nor the congregation – as singing causes significant aerosolization of moisture from the lungs which can carry the virus if someone is infected. We do not know enough yet to determine if transmission of the virus can be effectively controlled with masks while singing.
- Use non-contact methods of passing the peace, offering, and communion.
- Communicate to congregants that they will need to refrain from hand shaking, hugging, and spending more than a few minutes in fellowship with each other unless they are staying physically distant

- Clean and disinfect the bathrooms – provide disinfectant wipes in the bathroom and post signage asking people to wipe down the surfaces they touch or cough or sneeze on before leaving the bathroom.
- Clean and disinfect all areas where people have gathered in between the gatherings
- And....if you have not used the building in weeks or months....plan to flush your water system to prevent contaminated water that can cause Legionnaires disease and other bacterial diseases.