



## IKC guidance to congregations for Healthy Continuity of Ministry and Mission during the COVID-19 Pandemic – updated March 2021

### Summary

***We are seeing signs of hope and new life. While hope draws near, our collective health is still at risk. Therefore, we urge a gentle caution as you discern and assess the data for your incremental re-opening plans.***

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a significant factor in our lives for when and how we gather together. The extent of the virus's spread is abating and the hope of what vaccines will mean for our ability to congregate is bringing hope to many. The current abatement and the hope associated with vaccines, however, does not yet mean a return to “normal”.

The most enduring ways of assessing risk for our communities and the different ways we can gather continues to be provided by our public health authorities. Links to the metrics and guidelines at a state and national level are provided at the end of this guidance. We strongly advise using these as your primary sources. If these have been serving you well, continue using them. Beyond what you find in the public health guidelines, we have addressed several situations specific to the ministry settings of local churches, in this guidance including:

- How to factor vaccination into your discernment process
- Pastoral care visits
- Small group gatherings
- In-person worship

Because each situation is different – we have designed a framework to assess whether your situation is “More Safe,” “Somewhat Safe,” or “Less Safe.” Depending on where you are in these metrics in the charts below, as long as individual and community conditions are such that mitigations can be used to be More Safe, or at least Somewhat Safe, there are pathways to gathering in-person.

#### **Formative action process to do now:**

**Discern the degree of safety to accept** – we recommend activities that are assessed as More Safe, or at least Somewhat Safe. How to determine what is More Safe or at least Somewhat Safe is detailed in this guidance.

**Mitigate risks of gathering** – develop and act upon a plan that specifically mitigates the risks of gathering so that the situation will be More Safe for everyone involved. Various ways of mitigating risks for situations ranging from pastoral care visits and small group gatherings to in-person worship are detailed in this guidance.

**Communicate with each other** – we live in covenant with each other and therefore our open and honest communication regarding our hopes, anxieties, risks, and commitments to keep each other

healthy will be an essential part of fully living into that covenant. Brene Brown says that “Clear is kind” and our communicating clearly with each other on our shared expectations is a kind and compassionate way for us to move towards re-gathering safely over time.

## **Full Guidance**

### **What to Know**

***The pandemic is not done. We must continue to act with caution and love. Things are getting better. There is Hope.***

The hopeful news:

- COVID-19 cases have been decreasing since the surge at the end of 2020.
- COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths have been decreasing since their peak several weeks ago.
- Three vaccines have received Emergency Use Authorization and are being administered.

The cautionary news:

- More than 500,000 people have died in the last year from COVID.
- Millions of people continue to experience loss of family or friends.
- Millions of people continue to experience loss of health, livelihood, and joy.
- We do NOT yet have community level immunity, also known as herd immunity, from the vaccines.
- New variants of the COVID virus are more transmissible.
- Mitigation measures are still necessary.

The combination of hopeful news and cautionary news means that we are in an even more complex space when it comes to making decisions about gathering together with other people and what activities we choose to do. Many people feel done with the cautions and just want to get on with life as we knew it before March 2020. We want Easter 2021 to be a physical resurrection of our in-person gatherings. There are more in-person activities that can be considered somewhat safe or more safe than they were at the end of 2020. The danger, however, is not past. The virus is still actively in our communities and causing illness and death. We all are wondering how to balance doing more of what we crave and keeping both ourselves and our community safe.

We are offering guidance for how you and/or your church might find a balance in the choices you make based on the conditions of your community. We are using metrics that focus on COVID case loads and positivity rates as provided by public health authorities. We also have begun to incorporate the mitigation impact of vaccine availability and administration rates in addition to the continued use of face masks, physical distancing, and other physical mitigation measures.

## **A path of Hope – vaccination**

***We encourage anyone who is eligible and for whom a vaccine is a safe option to become vaccinated against COVID-19.***

The most significant path of hope is the introduction of vaccines to create both individual and community protection from COVID. The IKC encourages everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they are both eligible and consider it appropriate for themselves. We recognize that not everyone will find it appropriate to become vaccinated as soon as they are eligible, but we are hopeful that people will remain open to this opportunity and pursue it when it is right for them.

A community of people will be more safe when vaccination rates are at least 75%. The community will be somewhat safe when vaccination rates are between 50-75%. Until these rates are achieved however, gathering together as a community needs to occur only when COVID case loads are low, and the community is continuing to use physical mitigation measures such as face masks, distancing, and good hygiene and cleaning practices. Scientists are expecting that a return to life without mitigation measures will require a level of community immunity known as herd immunity. Scientists do not know the precise percentage of people that need to be immune, whether through vaccination or by having had the disease and developing their own antibodies and immunity. They estimate for COVID that herd immunity might be achieved once vaccination rates are in the range of 75% or more, but until they learn more and the impact of new variants is determined, herd immunity is not a current reality.

**Pastoral care and small group gatherings:** IF all parties have been fully vaccinated for at least two weeks, pastoral care visits or small group gatherings may be considered somewhat safe or more safe even if the community levels of COVID are not ready for larger group gatherings. Please note that the impact of virus variants on the efficacy of vaccines will need to be monitored and are currently not known. The CDC has released guidance relevant to small group gatherings for fully vaccinated people and can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

Please also keep in mind that while the vaccines are effective at preventing an individual from experiencing a severe case of COVID, it is still unknown if a vaccinated person can be infected and transmit the virus to others. This means that even vaccinated people need to take precautionary measures such as wearing a face mask or physically distancing themselves when they are with others who have not been vaccinated or when they do not know the vaccination status of others. This is particularly important given the rise of new COVID variants that are more readily transmitted.

Partnering with community health organizations offering information about vaccines, supporting people as they express anxiety about receiving or not qualifying for a vaccination, and listening to and providing opportunities for your pastors and members to relate their vaccination experiences will be an important aspect of ministry in the months to come. We do NOT recommend requiring vaccinations for pastors as a condition of employment or for congregants as a condition of participation.

Vaccine information can be found at:

For Indiana: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/vaccine/>

For Kentucky: <https://govstatus.egov.com/ky-covid-vaccine>

## Discern and assess your community and individual risks, and mitigations

***Determine both your community and individual risks and mitigations – Avoid situations where the majority of risk metrics and mitigations are in the Not Safe or Less Safe category.***

### **FAQ: When is it safe to gather?**

**Answer:** It depends. While this is not an easy answer, you can safely gather when the majority of your community and individual conditions are in the “More Safe” category as described in the table below. If you are willing to accept some additional risk, you may choose to gather when the majority of your community and individual conditions are in the “Somewhat Safe” category. We strongly recommend that you not gather if your community and/or individual conditions are mostly in the “Not Safe or Less Safe” category.

The degree of safety also depends on the gathering conditions and the planned or expected activities that will occur at the gathering. Check the following resources and tables and determine how many factors are in each safety category, and then go to the section on **Discern and assess the gathering conditions and activity risks**.

### **Community level metrics can be found at the following resources:**

COVID spread:

- For Indiana: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/2393.htm>. This will include case loads reported as #weekly per 100,000 and will also include test positivity rates.
- For Kentucky: <https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19>. This will include case loads reported as #daily per 100,000. The Kentucky dashboard does not include test positivity rates.
- For both Indiana and Kentucky: <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>. For Indiana, this dashboard will provide information as #daily per 100,000. For either state, you can find a variety of other metrics on their dashboards.

COVID vaccinations:

- We recommend using the data for percent population vaccinated at a state level as this is currently the most readily available and also helps to assess risk for your community given that people are likely to travel between counties creating exposure across county lines. The CDC has a dashboard that shows state level data and includes information on percent of population vaccinated: [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#).
- For Indiana: a single source to determine percent of people in a county that have been vaccinated is not available. The Indiana COVID dashboard has a section that shows total numbers of people vaccinated by county and this can be found at <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/vaccine/2680.htm>.
- For Kentucky: a single source to determine percent of people in a county that have been vaccinated is not available. The Kentucky COVID dashboard has a section that provides information on number of doses administered and can be found at: <https://govstatus.egov.com/ky-covid-vaccine>.

**Community Level Metrics**

<b>Metric for COVID spread</b>	<b>Not Safe or Less Safe</b>	<b>Somewhat Safe</b>	<b>More Safe</b>
County color code per state health dept	Orange or red	Yellow or Blue (IN) Yellow (KY)	Blue (IN) and Green per globalepidemics.org Green (KY)
County color code per globalepidemics.org	Orange or red	Yellow	Green
Positivity rates	>10%	<= 10%	<= 5%
<b>Mitigation measures</b>			
Vaccination rates (at a state level)	<50%	50-75%	75+%
Face masks	Not worn or not worn correctly	Worn correctly by many	Worn correctly by most
Distancing	People do not distance at least 6 feet at events	People stay distant by at least 6 feet at events	People stay distant more than 6 feet at events; or event is held virtually

**Personal Level Metrics**

<b>Personal risk factors:</b>	<b>Not Safe or Less Safe</b>	<b>Somewhat Safe</b>	<b>More Safe</b>
Health	Experiencing symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID	Feeling well	Feeling well
Immune system	Immune system compromised	Not immune compromised	Not immune compromised
COVID status	Tested positive in the last 14 days	Tested negative recently or not tested because you are feeling well	Tested negative recently and have quarantined since being tested
<b>Personal mitigation factors:</b>			
Vaccination status – if receiving a 2-shot vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)	Not vaccinated or less than two weeks since receiving shot #1 of a 2-shot vaccine	More than 2 weeks after receiving 1 <sup>st</sup> shot, but have not received 2 <sup>nd</sup> shot; or it has been less than 2 weeks since receiving 2 <sup>nd</sup> shot	More than 2 weeks after receiving 2 <sup>nd</sup> shot
Vaccination status – if receiving a 1-shot vaccine (J&J)	Not vaccinated or less than two weeks since receiving shot	More than 2 weeks after receiving shot	More than 2 weeks after receiving shot
Home and work exposure	Significant and prolonged exposure to individuals with COVID	Exposed to other people who actively practice mitigation measures; or only moderate exposure to other people	Little to no exposure to other people
Face masks	Not worn or not worn correctly	Wear correctly	Wear correctly
Distancing	Comes close to other people without other mitigation measures	Stays distant or uses other mitigation measures if coming within 6 feet	Stays distant and uses other mitigation measures; or meets virtually

**Discern and assess gathering conditions and planned or expected activities**

***Determine the expected gathering conditions and the activities that might occur – Avoid situations where the majority of gathering conditions, mitigations, and activities are in the Not safe or Less safe category.***

**FAQ: Can we have in-person worship?**

Answer: If your community COVID scores are either Somewhat Safe or More Safe, assess your specific Event Risk (see below for a link and guidance). If that is also Somewhat Safe or More Safe, then determine if your community is ready and able for in-person worship. Plan for continued use of mitigations such as face masks, distancing, good ventilation – possibly outdoors, good hygiene and

cleaning, and communicate these expectations to participants. Post signage for visitors to let them know what is expected. See the table below for specific activities and how to do them in at least a somewhat or preferably, a more safe manner.

### **FAQ: Can we have small group meetings in-person?**

Answer: If the group size is less than about 10, AND both the personal risk factors and personal mitigations for the involved individuals fall in the Somewhat Safe or More Safe category, establish a set of expectations about how to meet safely. Consult the table below for some common activities that may occur with an in-person gathering and set expectations that the group will follow the recommended mitigations to be at least Somewhat Safe and preferably More Safe. Establish a way to communicate within the group about what will make them feel loved and safe when they gather.

### **FAQ: Can we have in-person pastoral care visits?**

Answer: When all people, including the pastor, who will be involved in a pastoral care visit are vaccinated, then it is in the More Safe category and can be done with love, care, and attention to how to continue to ensure the safety of all involved individuals. Pastoral visits should continue to include mitigations of risk even if all individuals are vaccinated until there is no longer community spread. The continued practice of mitigated risk is important because it is unknown how long a vaccine confers immunity and it is unknown how well the vaccines will protect against new variants of COVID. If all people involved are not vaccinated, then in-person pastoral care visits can still occur with physical mitigation measures including face masks, distancing, good hygiene, and short durations.

### **Assess Event Risk**

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 3 or 5. If your community has widely available testing, use “3” as your event’s ascertainment bias. If your community has limited availability for testing, use “5” as your event’s ascertainment bias.

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%. 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.

### Gathering conditions

Gathering size	Not Safe or Less Safe	Somewhat Safe	More Safe
2-10 people	Individuals have a majority of not safe or less safe risk factors	Individuals have a majority of somewhat safe risk factors	Individuals have a majority of more safe risk factors
More than 10 people	Event risk tool shows risk is greater than 25%	Event risk tool shows risk is less than 25%	Event risk tool shows risk is substantially less than 25%
Mitigation measures			
Duration	Minimum is unknown, but gatherings that extend for an hour or more are less safe	Unknown; but the lower the duration, the safer it will be	Less than 15-20 minutes
Indoor/Outdoor	Indoor with full or nearly full capacity	Indoor with less than 50% capacity;	Indoor less than 25% capacity or outdoor
Ventilation	No or poor ventilation	Some ventilation	Good ventilation
Masks	Masks not worn or not worn correctly	Masks worn by many, but not all	Masks worn by all
Distancing	People do not distance at least 6 feet at events	People stay distant by at least 6 feet at events	People stay distant more than 6 feet or event is held virtually
Hygiene/Cleaning	No or poor hygiene or cleaning	Inconsistent or not done just prior to gathering	Consistent and done just prior to gathering; possibly done during gathering depending on activities

### Planned or expected activities

Planned or expected activities	Not safe or less safe	Somewhat safe	More safe
Speaking	Everyone speaking and/or loud speaking	Moderate levels of speaking, soft spoken	Limited or only a few speakers, soft spoken
Singing	Everyone or many singing	Only a few are singing	No singing
Eating	Indoors, buffet	Pre-assembled, or distributed outdoors, or to-go	Pre-packaged food, outdoors, or no eating
Communion	Tearing bread, common cup, passed elements	Host or pre-cut bread, individual cups	Pre-packaged elements or Spiritual Communion
Care visits	No mitigations	Use mitigations but individuals not vaccinated	Virtual or all individuals vaccinated; mitigations are still best practice

## Resources:

### CDC guidelines:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

### Vaccine information can be found at:

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### COVID spread metrics:

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### COVID vaccination rates and/or doses administered

- [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#).
- For Indiana: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/vaccine/2680.htm>.
- For Kentucky: <https://govstatus.egov.com/ky-covid-vaccine>.

### Assess Event Risk

<https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>