

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Faith Based Organizations

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health) is asking for your assistance to prepare for and help prevent the spread of the novel (new) coronavirus in Los Angeles County. Globally, there continues to be a growing number of people infected with this virus which causes “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated COVID-19) in mainland China and elsewhere. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, current global trends indicate that the virus may continue to spread worldwide. We need to prepare to prevent the spread of this infection locally.

While the immediate health risk of COVID-19 to the general public in Los Angeles is still considered low, Public Health is proactively taking steps to prevent the spread of this infection. We strongly recommend that all organizations review and update their emergency plans and consider ways to continue essential services if on-site operations must be reduced temporarily.

We are concerned about how a case of COVID-19 in a gathering place such as a place of worship might impact your community. We would like to provide you with some general information about COVID-19 as well as recommendations to help prevent the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19 at your faith-based organization. We encourage you to visit the DPH Novel Coronavirus webpage for resources including Guidance for Business and Employers, Frequently Asked Questions and infographics: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>.

General Information

What is novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Many of them infect animals, but some coronaviruses from animals can evolve (change) and infect humans, then spread from person-to-person. This is what happened with the current novel coronavirus. Diseases from coronaviruses in people typically cause mild to moderate illness, like the common cold. Some, like the SARS or MERS viruses, cause serious infections like pneumonia.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19?

Information to date shows this new virus causes symptoms consistent with a respiratory illness, such as cough, fever, and, in some, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.

How are coronaviruses spread?

Like other respiratory illnesses, such as influenza, human coronaviruses most commonly spread to others from an infected person who has symptoms through:

- Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- Close personal contact, such as caring for an infected person
- Touching an object or surface with viruses on it, then touching one’s mouth, nose, or eyes

Novel coronavirus is new, and we are learning more each day about how easily it spreads and how long it takes for people to become sick.

What can I do to protect myself and others from respiratory infections like novel coronavirus?

There are steps that everyone can take to prevent the spread of respiratory infections including novel coronavirus.

Everyday personal prevention actions:

- Stay home when you are sick. Stay home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or symptoms of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

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- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and then dispose of the tissue and clean your hands immediately. If you do not have a tissue, use your sleeve (not your hands).
- Limit close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipes.

Faith Based Organizations

What preventive measures should be taken at an organizational level to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, like the virus that causes COVID-19?

- Educate and emphasize the importance of the everyday personal prevention actions.
- Encourage and support staff, volunteers, and members of your congregation to stay home when they are sick. Remind them to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.
- Provide adequate supplies for good hygiene, including easy access to clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Minimize, where possible, close contact and the sharing of objects including, food, and drink. This includes modifying practices such as the sharing of communal sacramental cups and wafers, or practices that consist of congregants shaking hands and hugging each other as part of a salutation
- Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs, bannisters, countertops, faucet handles, and phones. Use the usual cleaning agents and follow the label directions.

What should our organization be prepared to do if there is increased community transmission of COVID-19?

Increased community transmission of COVID-19 would indicate growing risk to the general public and that additional precautions may need to be taken to contain any local community transmission. Organizations should have a plan and be prepared to take these additional actions, if recommended by Public Health:

- Have a plan to communicate with your staff and your congregation.
- Allow any workers and volunteers to stay home if someone in their house is sick or school closures have occurred.
- Decrease the frequency of contact among workers or volunteers at your organization. Offer telecommuting if feasible and replace in-person meetings with video or telephone conferences.
- Implement ways to continue essential services if on-site operations are reduced temporarily.
- Houses of worship may need to consider suspending services if a significant number of members have been in close contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus; such individuals (close contacts) may be required to quarantine for up to 14 days from last exposure. A call for large scale closure of many religious places of worship would happen only if there was significant community transmission that could not be well-controlled through other strategies.
- Modify, postpone, or cancel large community events where people are in close contact with others for an extended period. Such events may need to be cancelled or modified should there be significant community transmission in a particular community or many different communities. We will work with faith-based organizations and places of worship to assess risk and determine effective mitigation strategies. Should we experience a rapid increase in the number of cases across the County, we may call for cancellation of many different types of public events.

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Know where to get reliable information

Beware of scams, false news and hoaxes surrounding novel coronavirus. Accurate information, including announcements of new cases in LA County, will always be distributed by Public Health through press releases, social media, and our website. The website has more information on COVID-19 including FAQs, infographics and a guide to coping with stress, as well as tips on handwashing

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH, County)
 - <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>
 - Social media: @lapublichealth
- The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Access Center 24/7 Helpline (800) 854-7771.

Other reliable sources of information about novel coronavirus are:

- California Department of Public Health (CDPH, State)
 - <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, National)
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>
- World Health Organization (WHO, International)
 - <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

You may continue to call 2-1-1 for information. We have attached an FAQ for you to share with your staff and congregation about COVID-19 and personal prevention measures.

We appreciate your commitment and dedication to keeping Los Angeles County healthy.