

Explanations for Church Building & Grounds Procedures During COVID-19 Pandemic

prepared by the Westside UU Church Safe Congregation Committee (Sep 2021)

*“One of the most important changes we have learned about the Delta variant is that even though vaccination reduces the chances of severe disease, **vaccination does not prevent a person from getting infected or transmitting the virus to others.** This means that even when we are vaccinated we can contribute to increased community spread. As the CDC says, our guidance is changing because the virus is changing.”*

--The Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray

Gathering Risk Levels

These guidelines will be in effect as long as Tarrant County is classified as “**High Risk**” or above by the New York Times Coronavirus Tracker (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/tarrant-texas-covid-cases.html>).

Risk Level	Gathering Opportunities
Extremely High Risk	No in-person gatherings - online only
Very High Risk	Only outdoor gatherings with restrictions and protocols outlined in this document
High Risk	Indoor and outdoor gatherings with restrictions and protocols outlined in this document
Moderate Risk	Indoor and outdoor gatherings with enhanced safety protocols
Low Risk	No gathering restrictions at Tarrant County vaccination is 55%+

The Guidelines:

1. For all indoor gatherings, regardless of size, or vaccination status: Require good ventilation, well-fitted masks, physical distancing of at least 6 ft, reduced occupancy, no singing, and no food, nor drinks until Tarrant County reaches “**Low Risk**” or below.

2. Require well-fitted masks for **all** outdoor events until Tarrant County reaches “Moderate Risk” or below.
3. As children below age 12 cannot yet be vaccinated, hold children’s religious education activities and multi-age programs outdoors. If children are indoors, ensure good ventilation, masking, physical distancing, and reduced room occupancy until Tarrant County reaches “Moderate Risk” or below.
4. Suspend all **large** (greater than 12 individuals) in-person indoor gatherings such as worship, community meetings, or fundraisers until Tarrant County reaches “Moderate Risk” or below.
5. **Small** (less than 5 individuals) or **mid-sized** (10-12 individuals) in-person indoor gatherings, including limited-attendance worship, may be reasonably safe if indoor precautions for masking, ventilation, physical distancing and high vaccination rates are followed and Tarrant County is at “High Risk” or below. (Not at “Very High Risk” or “Extremely High Risk”.)
6. Create an expectation that vaccinations are required for everyone who is eligible. Work to have the highest vaccination rate possible in your community. We support requiring vaccinations for staff, lay leaders, and anyone spending time with children.

Well-Fitted Masks

Whether the CDC says vaccinated people do or don’t need masks, the CDC’s guidance is about *individuals*. As a congregation, our decision about masking or un-masking needs to be about *community*. We are in covenant with one another to act not just as a collection of individuals, but as a body that works for the good of all.

Because our Unitarian Universalist faith is grounded in values that call us to care about one another, we must continue to make our decisions by centering the needs of the most vulnerable among us.

The UUA encourages congregations to maintain a culture of indoor masking when they regather in person. This is because of who we are, as congregations, at our best:

- We are all-ages communities, and not all ages have been able to get vaccinated yet.

- We are all-abilities communities, and some of us have immune systems that do not mount a strong protective response after the COVID vaccination and can suffer severe consequences upon infection.
- We care for the health of all. Even though “breakthrough” infections are rarely severe, we know that they can cause long term symptoms and contribute to the spread of COVID.
- Congregations should encourage well-fitted masks with strong filtration. The highest available filtration is N95. These can be difficult to find and only function at this level when they are adequately fitted. A KN95 is the next best mask with strong filtration. There are a variety of ways to improve the filtration of masks people have available including double-masking, adding a filter, and/or making your mask fit tighter.

A well-fitted mask covers the nose and mouth and fits snugly under the chin, over the bridge of the nose and against the sides of the face so that it does not need to be touched or adjusted while in use.

Singing Guidance

As we grapple with the Delta surge, we have once again turned to our public health advisors. Their collective wisdom about singing, in particular, boils down to two points:

1. No indoor singing at this time.
2. For outdoor singing (where outdoor gatherings have been deemed safe), all singers must wear well-fitted masks and stay at least 12 feet apart.

We know this is hard. Nearly all of our advisors made clear that any form of singing inside a building is problematic and ill-advised for now, especially as the science around delta transmission is still emerging.

Sadly, from a COVID-19 transmission standpoint, singing is markedly riskier than talking and most other interactions. Whatever degree of distancing you might consider acceptable for other purposes, you should increase it significantly if singing is involved. Special attention should be given to the quality and fit of masks. If you've set time limits for gatherings, you might shorten them when there's singing.

COVID-19 Vaccination for Staff, Members, and Visitors

We know vaccination is how we end this pandemic and care for each other. Our congregation has a high rate of vaccination because people have been volunteering this information. But we also have children under 12 and immunocompromised adults who are not as well protected by vaccination. We will follow the guidance of science while centering inclusion, consent, and flexibility.

Members, friends, and visitors are likely to want to know, even if they don't ask, what the level of vaccination is in our congregation and our approach to vaccination. Being transparent allows people to make more informed safety decisions for themselves. We can explain:

- *"We do not ask the vaccination status of those attending our services; however we require vaccination of those supervising children under 12."*
- *"We know from personal sharing that more than 90% of our congregation is vaccinated. We hope visitors are also vaccinated, unless medical conditions prevent this. We are continuing to require masks for all people in order to slow the virus's spread and to protect our children and more vulnerable members of our congregation."*

Vaccination Resources

- [How to Talk to Someone Fearful of Getting the Vaccine](#), from the *New York Times*
- [Houses of Worship Grapple with the Vaxxed and Un-Vaxxed Divide](#), from NPR
- [The Unseen Covid Risk for Unvaccinated People](#), from the *Washington Post*
- [They Haven't Gotten a Covid Vaccine Yet. But They Aren't 'Hesitant' Either](#), from the *New York Times*