

## REVISED COVID Policy: Synod Events During the Pandemic

To safeguard the health and safety of event participants, Synod teams, volunteers, and staff, we adopt the following protocols for Synod-sponsored or endorsed events.

Executive Summary	
<b>Participants, presenters, event staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide proof of <i>full</i> vaccination, including boosters if applicable</li><li>Wear a mask covering their mouth and nose at all times</li><li>Maintain physical distancing</li><li>Wash hands regularly</li><li>STAY HOME if feeling sick</li></ul>
<b>Venues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Limit attendance to 25% of capacity.</li><li>Provide 6 to 8 air changes per hour in event space(s).</li><li>Proper air filtration</li></ul>
<b>No-go criteria for in-person events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>High community transmission (&gt; 20 new cases/100K)</li><li>High ICU utilization (&gt; 80%)</li><li><b>Test positivity rate &gt; 10%</b></li><li>Check data at: <a href="https://www.covidactnow.org">https://www.covidactnow.org</a></li><li>Decisions should be made at least 14 days in advance for events of 40 people or under, and at least 30 days in advance for larger events.<sup>1</sup></li></ul>

### Detail

Mitigation steps, including requiring vaccination, proper wearing of masks, increased ventilation, and physical distancing, are most effective when applied in layers. Event staff, volunteers, and attendees of in-person events will:

- Provide proof of full vaccination to enter the venue. This means at least two weeks after completing two Moderna or Pfizer shots or 1 J&J shot, plus a booster if eligible.
- Always wear a mask covering their nose and mouth during the event.
- Maintain physical distancing between individuals not from the same household.
- Wash hands regularly.
- STAY HOME if an individual feels sick, including symptoms of COVID, even if the person is staffing or presenting at the event.
- For the safety of participants, no religious, medical, or other exemptions from these mitigation steps will be granted.

<sup>1</sup> Also consider cancellation deadlines for venues, caterers, and other vendors.

We endorse the ecumenical guidance created by many church bodies, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and based on CDC guidance. In its simplest form, the guidance is:

- Alternatives to indoor gatherings are encouraged where test positivity rates are >10% and ICU utilization is >85%
- Masks should be worn by all participants indoors, and outdoors when singing, as well as when physical distancing cannot be accommodated.
- Use data from <https://www.covidactnow.org>

If all participants are required to be fully vaccinated<sup>2</sup>, organizers may adjust based on community transmission in all areas where participants and speakers are traveling from. Measures of community transmission include: the rates and trends for new cases; the proportion of the total population fully vaccinated<sup>3</sup>; infection rate; ICU utilization; and deaths.

Event organizers must meet the following best practices regarding event venues:

- Decisions about whether to proceed in-person should be made at least 14 days in advance for events of 40 people or under, and at least 30 days in advance for larger events. Small gatherings (10 people or fewer) can be held indoors if there is sufficient space to distance participants with at least six feet of separation in all directions.
- Larger gatherings can be held indoors with attendance (staff, presenters, and attendees) limited to 25 percent<sup>4</sup> of the space's maximum occupancy.
  - Occupancy limits apply to every space used by the event, including refreshment areas and breakout rooms.
- Outdoor activities must maintain at least 6 feet of distance between members of different households.
- Maximizing ventilation in all spaces used is key.
- Host sites should be able to provide the equivalent of 6 to 8 air changes per hour through HVAC system and/or by opening windows to admit fresh air.
- Air filtration should include MERV13, HEPA or appropriately sized UV filters.

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(updated material in blue)

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<sup>2</sup> As of December 10, 2021, there is concern that vaccines may provide reduced protection from the Omicron variant. Experts also remind us that protection from vaccines wanes after six months from the final dose, and at this time a minority of vaccinated individuals have received boosters.

<sup>3</sup> As of December 10, 2021, rates of full vaccination range from 57% to 63% in SEPA counties.

<sup>4</sup> On May 13, 2021, when 2,064 new cases per day were reported in PA, and numbers were falling rapidly, the state expired many mitigation requirements and increased indoor occupancy to 50%. On December 8, however, 7,890 new cases were reported and are trending upward. We are now at case levels we have not seen since mid-January, during the winter surge. Accordingly, it is prudent to continue the earlier guidance of 25% occupancy.