

REVISED COVID Protocol: Synod Events During the Lingering Pandemic Southeastern PA Synod, ELCA

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

(Sponsored events include educational programs and workshops, retreats, assembly and RME2, installations/ordinations, staff and committee/team meetings.)

Executive Summary	
Participants, presenters, event staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAY HOME if feeling sick • Provide proof of being up to date with vaccinations, defined by the CDC as receiving all doses in the primary series and booster doses.¹ • Follow CDC Community Levels to determine requirements for wearing masks. If required or optional, masks must be worn covering the mouth and nose. • If the organizer(s) determine that masking is necessary to allow inclusion of immunocompromised or at-risk persons, masks may be required regardless of Community Level. • Maintain physical distancing • Wash hands regularly
No-go criteria for in-person events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium or High Community Levels as determined by the CDC. Check at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html • Also check case counts at https://covidact.now
Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizers should plan for an online option for those who do not wish to attend in-person. • Go/no-go decisions should be made at least 7 days in advance for events of 40 people or under, and at least 30 days in advance for larger events.² <i>However</i>, if conditions worsen by the time of the event, re-evaluate the decision.
Venues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit attendance to allow for physical distancing. • Provide adequate ventilation with fresh air as described under “Ventilation” (below).

¹ “**Up to date** means a person has received all recommended doses in their primary series COVID-19 vaccine, and one booster when eligible.” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html> retrieved April 5 2022.

² Also consider cancellation deadlines for venues, caterers, and other vendors.

Detail

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

- STAY HOME if an individual feels sick, including but not limited to symptoms of COVID, even if the person is staffing or presenting at the event.
- Provide proof of “up to date” vaccination to enter the venue. This means at least two weeks after completing the primary series of vaccines and any boosters for which they are eligible.
- If masks are required, everyone must wear a mask covering their nose and mouth during the event.³
- Maintain physical distancing between individuals not from the same household.
- Wash hands regularly.
- For the safety of participants, no religious, medical, or other exemptions from these mitigation steps will be granted.

Ventilation: “An important approach to lowering the concentrations of indoor air pollutants or contaminants including any viruses that may be in the air is to increase ventilation – the amount of outdoor air coming indoors,” according to the Environmental Protection Agency.⁴ In schools/commercial buildings the idea is 3.5-6 air changes per hour.⁵

“Increasing ventilation with all or mostly outside air may not always be possible or practical. In such cases, the effective rate of ventilation per person can also be increased by limiting the number of people present in the building in general, or in specific rooms. Administrative practices that encourage remote participation and reduce room occupancy can help reduce risks from SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19,” according to the EPA.⁶ (Consult the current ASHRAE⁷ guidance.)

Community Levels: In February 2022 the CDC changed its criteria for determining risk in the community, which focus on avoiding overwhelming the health care system. These CDC Community Levels are the minimum requirements for synod sponsored events. Organizers may choose to follow more stringent requirements to protect participants.

Online Alternatives: Organizers are encouraged to make online alternatives available via live streams, online conferencing platforms (Zoom, Teams, etc.), and/or conference calls.

³ If the organizer(s) determine that masking is necessary to allow inclusion of immunocompromised or at-risk persons, masks may be required regardless of Community Level.

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/ventilation-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

⁵ “Indoor Air Changes and Potential Implications for SARS-CoV-2 Transmission,” JAMA Insights, April 16, 2021, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2779062>

⁶ <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/ventilation-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

⁷ <https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/technical%20resources/covid-19/core-recommendations-for-reducing-airborne-infectious-aerosol-exposure.pdf>

Geographic Scope: 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 vaccinated⁸; infection rate; ICU utilization; and deaths.

Congregational Singing: Consult the current recommendations of the Center for Congregational Song at <https://congregational-song.org/covid-updates-congregational-song/>.

Food and Drink: Refreshments and/or meals are appropriate in well-ventilated areas where people from different households can be physically distanced.

Ecumenical Guidance: We endorse the ecumenical guidance created by many church bodies, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and based on CDC guidance. See <https://sites.google.com/view/worshipsafely>. (*Note: The most recent update of this information is dated June 8, 2021.*)

Best Practices:

- Decisions about whether to proceed in-person should be made at least 7 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 allow for safe physical distancing.
 - This applies 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 3.5-6 air changes per hour through HVAC system and/or by opening windows to admit fresh air, using fans for circulation. Consult a professional to determine characteristics of a venue.
- Air filtration should include MERV13, HEPA or appropriately sized UV filters.
- If adequate ventilation with fresh air is not possible, other protections (wearing masks, physical distancing, reduced occupancy) should be emphasized.

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⁸ As of March 11, 2022, 20-30% of people in SEPA counties are “up to date” with vaccines, and 60-76% have completed the primary series of vaccines.