



## Pandemic Preparedness Tips for the Faith Community

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With the widespread discussion of COVID-19 and a possible pandemic on the horizon, taking time to consider how to plan within your organization to limit the spread of disease is an important topic. During times of crisis, the faith community is where many people turn to for support. How do you continue to offer support and ministry without putting your personnel, leaders and participants at risk? The following are some tips to consider in planning with your congregation:

- ✓ Identify high-risk areas for the possibility of disease transmission. Respiratory infections are generally spread through direct or indirect contact with droplets from coughing or sneezing. The following are some common practices within churches that make transmitting infections easier:
  - Shaking hands – with greeters and after a service passing the peace
  - Communion services – especially if a common cup and loaf are used
  - Children's nursery and toddler room toys
  - Sunday school rooms, coffee hour and other socials times
- ✓ Establish an Emergency Planning Team to develop an emergency plan for the congregation. Delegate responsibility as one person cannot do it all and is not always available. Communicate the plan with the congregation ahead of time.
  - While planning, identify current activities and risk-level for further disease spread. Some ideas to minimize the risk during common activities include:
    - Have alcohol-based sanitizer available for use by greeters, the minister and members of the congregation.
    - Use an alternative for passing the peace, such as bowing with hands together or gently nodding towards each other.
    - Use individual cups and bread cubes for communion services.
    - Stock Sunday school rooms with a box of tissues, hand sanitizer and a wastepaper basket.
    - Clean all high-touch areas and sanitize all toys each week.
    - Encourage single-use plates, cups and utensils when possible.
    - Urge parishioners who are ill to refrain from attending services.
    - Encourage members who are ill with cough/sneeze to avoid certain activities during the service where they come into direct contact with other members or common items.

Healthy congregations in healthy communities are always the goal of public health and its partners. The faith community is a vital part of the infection-control process. Making minor adjustments to your weekly practices before, during and after worship can have a significant impact on the potential spread of infectious disease throughout your church and the community.