

Guidance for Faith Based Organizations

March 19, 2020

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a disease caused by a new (novel) virus that is now being spread throughout the world. All people are encouraged to take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as much as possible.
- Stay at least six feet away from all people other than those you live with.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not reuse tissue after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Develop a schedule to regularly disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched (doorknobs, light switches, telephones, refrigerator handles, etc.).

How does COVID-19 spread?

Coronaviruses like COVID-19 are most often spread by coughing or sneezing, through close personal contact (including touching and shaking hands) or through touching your nose, mouth or eyes with unwashed hands.

People at Higher Risk for Severe Illness

Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung or kidney disease and those with weakened immune systems seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness.

People at **high risk** include anyone:

- Over 65 years of age, or
- with underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes, or with weakened immune systems.

What should high-risk people do?

People at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 practice social distancing to reduce their risk of being exposed to the virus. This means staying home and away from other people as much as possible.



Suggestions for Congregations

Cancel or postpone any gatherings of more than 10 people.

- Per the [Gaston County State of Emergency Proclamation](#) which took effect on March 15, 2020, gatherings of 50 or more in places of public assembly is restricted.
- The [CDC](#) encourages organizations that serve people at higher risk of serious COVID-19 to cancel events for groups of 10 people or more.

Religious organizations can consider alternatives to mass gatherings to support their congregations' social and spiritual well-being. Consider options like connecting by phone, using other technologies that support social distancing and/or facilitating small group meetings to ensure that people at high risk of complications from COVID-19 are less likely to be exposed to the virus.

If small groups meetings are held, they should be outside or in a large room where people can stay at least six feet apart. People with any signs of illness (fever, cough, etc.) should not attend.

Congregations can support their community by offering assistance to populations who are at high risk for COVID-19 by helping with any errands that can prevent them from leaving their homes (i.e. grocery shopping, picking up medications, delivering meals, etc).

For more information about Coronavirus please see the following:

Gaston County Coronavirus Information Line: 704-862-5303

Gaston County Coronavirus webpage: www.gastongov.com/coronavirus

NC Coronavirus hotline: 1-866-462-3821

NCDHHS email: ncresponse@dhhs.nc.gov

NCDHHS website: www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus

