

RECOMMENDED CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR COVID-19
Alaska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
March 2020

(adapted from Upper Columbia Conference & North American Division)

Our world is currently impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Coronavirus). How should Alaska Conference (AKC) churches prepare, especially if it continues to expand? Each church should develop a plan for this potential pandemic. Following are proposed guidelines, thought questions, and ideas. Please keep in mind these points in developing your plan:

- Simple/short plans are best
- Balance and common sense are critical
- Each church should respond according to the local threat, keeping in mind your own unique situation

This document contains recommendations based on various threat levels, identified as green, yellow, orange and red. Please read and apply these suggestions carefully based on the current threat level.

Team Set-Up

Set up a Safety Team to focus on developing a safety protocol for your church beyond the guidelines provided here

- If you have medical professionals in your church invite them to be part of this team, ie. EMT, nurses, nurse practitioners, doctors, etc.
- Appoint the leader and communication leader for the team
- Consider including the pastor, head elder, head deacon, head deaconess, disaster response coordinator, and other health care providers

GREEN STATUS

General preparations that are good to follow before a crisis develops

PREVENTION

OPENING DOORS	User paper towels to open doors rather than by hands
SANITIZE	Sanitize weekly children's areas, children's boxes, props, etc. (these first two ideas are good year-round)
COMPLETE CLEANING	Cleaning routinely all surfaces commonly touched by hands such as tabletops, backs of pews, doorknobs, offering receptacles, etc. with a disinfectant solution according to instructions between use of these facilities
TISSUE BOXES	Provide tissue boxes in pews (visual reminder besides practical use)
POTLUCK	Provide hand sanitizer during potluck and other meals

Questions to Consider

- Are there special supplies that need to be purchased in bulk such as hand sanitizer, disinfectants, or tissues, disposable gloves?
- Will the janitorial staff or volunteers need special instruction in appropriate sanitizing?

COMMUNICATION | EDUCATION

INFO INSERT	Centers for Disease Control recognizes that any place people congregate is a wonderful opportunity for education. The provided bulletin insert prevention tips can be a powerful tool.
EDUCATE	Educate, educate, educate by voice, newsletters, email, and inserts.
BACK-UP PLANS	Establish policies of redundancy so that backup individuals will be available if the first line individuals are ill. For example, if the church secretary is ill or if the phone tree committee couldn't function who could step forward and keep the church operating? Who could fill in for the head elder or the head deacon?
EMERGENCY SURVIVAL KIT	Strongly recommend to members that they put together at least a Two-Weeks Ready "Survival" kit (including food, water, medication).
POTLUCK	Provide hand sanitizer during potluck and other meals

Questions to Consider

- How will updated information be communicated to church members?
- Update email addresses and cell phone numbers
- Can this information be put in the languages of our members whose native language is not English? NOTE: COVID-19 educational material about COVID-19 is available in many languages at the King County Health Department webpage, searching "COVID-19."
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/>

YELLOW ALERT

General Potential health crisis is developing with future potential of impacting the local level

- ☑ Alert the Safety team and set up meeting
- ☑ Safety team should identify an individual who will monitor recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), public health departments at both the state and county level and to process these recommendations to pass along to the church
- ☑ Each church should discuss the scope of responsibility for making strategic decisions during a crisis.

The church board may serve as a crisis oversight committee or you may choose to empower the Safety team. This team would have the authority in consultation with the pastor or head elder to cancel church, potlucks, specific Sabbath School classes, or to enlist organized help from the church for members struggling to care for themselves or their families

- ☑ Establish a means to monitor the number of cases in your church to enable the safety team to have the necessary knowledge to advise the church and to make their decisions if your church should require steps not required for other faith-based organizations
- ☑ POTLUCK/FELLOWSHIP LUNCH:
 - Have servers wearing gloves to serve food
 - Provide hand sanitizers attendant at the beginning of the food line to squirt it in people's hands – prevents having to touch the bottle

ORANGE ALERT

*An immediate health crisis is unfolding within the broader United States
but not yet immediately effecting your local community*

1. Practice social distancing; announce and explain to members why.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

GREETING	Find creative alternatives to shaking hands; ie. fist bump, elbow bump, “waving” is best
DISTANCE	Maintain a six-foot distance from other individuals when talking
QUARANTINE	Self-quarantine if feeling ill
POTLUCK	Temporarily suspend potlucks and other group meals

2. Update members on existing crisis response plans
 - Remind people of safe health practices.
 - Ensure basic **Green** & **Yellow** Status health practices are being followed
3. Identify official channels of communication for the congregation to minimize rumor and panic

RED ALERT

An outbreak is happening in your local community

1. **SUSPENSION:** Consider suspending worship services:

- **Spiritual Nurture**

Prepare for spiritual feeding of members by:

- Sermons on-line
- Planned daily Bible reading guides/blogs
- Sabbath School lesson blogs
- Facebook live sermons (this service is free and great for live interactions)
- Sermons via [Zoom Video](#) (Excellent for church family only: requires internet or cell phone service, \$15 monthly subscription and ability to use land line phones)
- Free Conference call: [Freeconference.com](#) is a free service were people call in and hear the message
- Television: HOPE Channel, 3ABN, LLBN, etc.
- Call the pastor
- The pastor/elders call members
- Other creative ways...

- **Communicate**

Communicate any closures to the members through all available communication channels

- Identify ways essential functions can be done from home or online
- Utilize phone

- **Online Giving**

Instruct members how to use online giving to give tithes and offerings online. Provide postal address to mail tithes/offerings for those who prefer this route.

- Encourage members to give extra offerings to help members economically affected by the pandemic
- Can church bills be met if offerings are substantially down? Discuss contingency plan.

2. **BASIC SPIRITUAL CARE:** Provide basic spiritual care for those in crisis

- Prayer chains – either online, by phone or both
- Phone trees for members to daily call one another (especially older members)
- Who will provide grief counseling in case the pandemic turns deadly?

3. **RENTERS:** Inform renters of facility closure

- If the church decides to close the facility due to a health crisis, inform all renters of the facility closure and make arrangements for adjusting rental fees due to lost usage

4. WEARING MASKS:

- Public Health does not currently recommend that people wear masks when they are in public. Scientists are not sure whether wearing a mask in public actually keeps healthy people from getting sick. However, people who are sick should wear a mask in a healthcare setting (such as a waiting room) to avoid exposing other people when they cough or sneeze.
- People wear masks for a variety of reasons, including to avoid pollen and air pollution, as a courtesy to others when they have the common cold, and for other cultural and even social reasons. This is an acceptable use of face masks.
- If we see our friends, neighbors or other community members wearing a mask, we should not assume that they have been exposed to coronavirus or any other illness. We should avoid making assumptions about why someone is wearing a mask and make sure not to stigmatize or discriminate against people who choose to wear masks.

Questions to Consider

- Is pastor expected to physically visit critically ill?
 - Covid-19 patients will be under hospital quarantine and will be in a special negative pressure room. It may not be possible to visit this patient to minimize exposure and spread of the virus. Visits can be done by phone using Facetime or other modes
- How will church respond if they know all members of a family are very ill?
 - Consider bringing food and other supplies – the best way to deliver it might be by leaving it at the front door vs. going in and visiting with the family
 - Remember to minimize exposure and reduce spread of the virus
- How will the church respond if there is a death and funerals are not allowed?