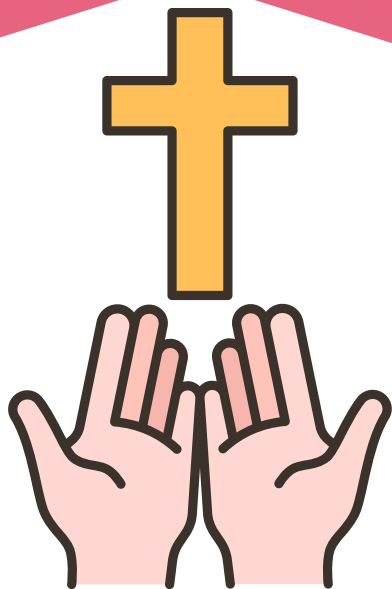


Rural Pennsylvania COVID-19 Faith Toolkit



Health Initiative for Rural Pennsylvania

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The COVID-19 pandemic affects Americans in all walks of life.

Funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH) formed the Health Initiative for Rural Pennsylvania (HIRP) to implement COVID-19 reduction strategies in rural Pennsylvania. Strategies are accomplished by building cross-sector county teams that develop and implement action plans to align public health, healthcare and non-health interventions.

Through a community development process in 20 rural Pennsylvania counties, the HIRP gathered information to help build this toolkit. The current politics, relationships, attitudes and behaviors of churches in Pennsylvania make preparation for future surges of COVID-19 especially challenging.

As we face the reality of an ongoing pandemic, this toolkit presents a current and innovative menu of ideas, options and strategies that may assist rural churches to address COVID-19 in the current climate.

Any questions, recommendations, or feedback regarding this toolkit can be directed to Erika Tuller (ekt5249@psu.edu) or Rachel Foster (rcf5257@psu.edu).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVID-19 Related to Religion.....	4
Public Health Guidance.....	5
Non-Invasive Mitigation Strategies.....	6
COVID-19 Testing.....	7
Proctored COVID-19 Testing.....	8
COVID-19 in the Community.....	9
COVID-19 Vaccination.....	10
Vaccine Ambassador.....	11
Offer Online Church Services.....	12
Prayers for Those Affected by COVID-19.....	13
Memorialize Members who Died from COVID-19.....	14
Faith Specific Education Resources.....	15
Mental Health.....	16
References.....	18

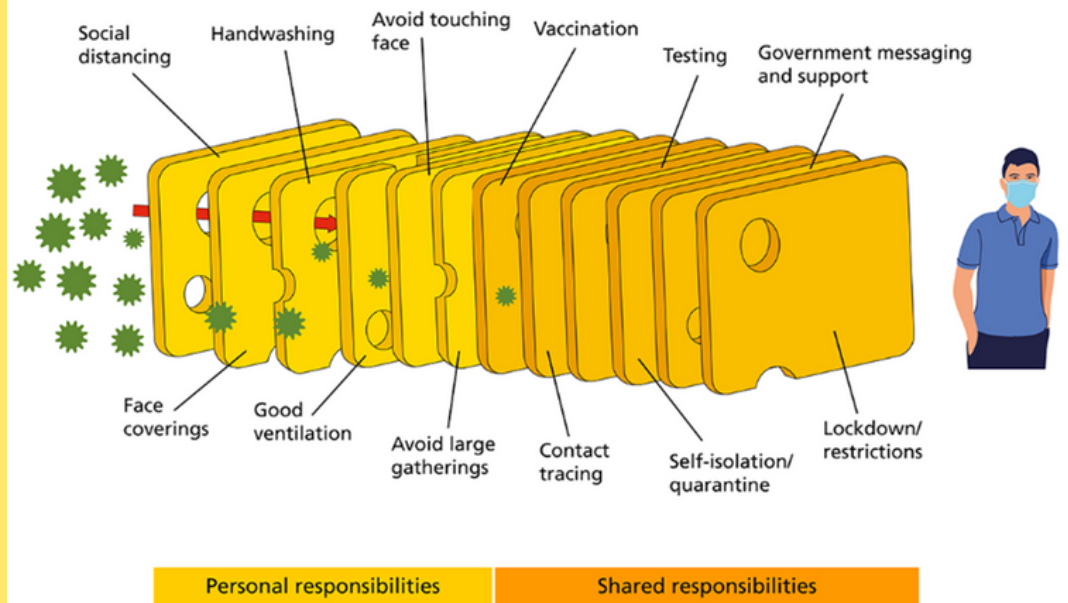
COVID-19 RELATED TO RELIGION

Faith-based interventions have been shown to be effective for health promotion (6). It is important for faith leaders, especially in rural areas to distribute accurate information surrounding COVID-19 and the vaccine. In rural areas, churches are a highly trusted, key gathering place for many individuals.



Vaccination is one mitigation strategy among many outlined below in the swiss cheese model. Multiple layers of protection improve success.

The Swiss Cheese Model of COVID-19 Prevention



No single intervention can be successful on its own. Multiple steps improve success.

If masking or vaccination are no longer possible, consider non-invasive mitigation strategies that provide a layered approach to improve success.

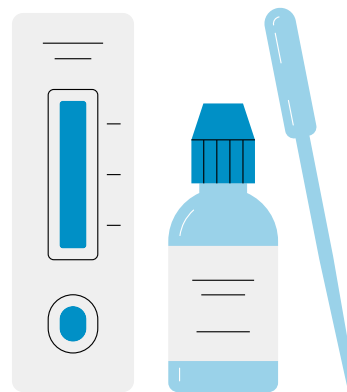
- Indoor ventilation systems: Corsi-Rosenthal box (low-cost, DIY option)
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible
- Social distancing
- Handwashing
- Routine cleaning and disinfection
- Distribute educational materials
- Promote choice-based messaging with ongoing communication and recommendations based on CDC's COVID-19 by County dashboard
- Serve as a Health and Wellness Resource Center - provide opportunities for community members to voluntarily pick up educational materials, home test kits, hand sanitizer, N-95 masks, thermometers or other educational resources
- Have a mitigation station at the entrance of the church- stocked with masks, hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes
- Test to Treat Program: Antiviral medications, especially for unvaccinated individuals, started within five (5) days of symptom onset reduce the severity of COVID-19. These medications are only approved at this time for adults.
- Share local resources for testing, test to treat program, vaccination and/or hospital status

COVID-19 TESTING

Testing for COVID-19 is important to help reduce the spread (3).

People should get tested:

- If they COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, new loss of taste or smell or sore throat)
 - At least 5 days after known or suspected close contact to COVID-19
- Pennsylvania Department of Health COVID-19 Public Testing Sites
 - Search for local testing locations
 - Order free at home test kits delivered to U.S. households at this link
 - Become a home test kit distribution location



PROCTORED COVID-19 TESTING

EMED: PROCTORED AT-HOME TESTING AND TEST TO TREAT TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

- This company provides proctored, certified at-home COVID-19 testing and test-to-treat opportunities via telehealth.
- They provide the test, guide the test taker through the process, verify results and, upon a positive result, will connect the individual to a health care provider who can prescribe treatment through a telehealth visit.
- The cost per person is \$18 with a test or \$25 if a test is needed.
- Contact Tara Daley (tara@emed.com) for more information.



COVID-19 IN THE COMMUNITY

As we progress into the fall and winter timeframe, it will be important to keep an eye on COVID-19 levels in your community. Below is a link to the CDC COVID-19 by County dashboard.

The COVID-19 Community Levels are a tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data.

Levels can be low, medium or high and are determined by looking at:

- Hospital beds being used
- Hospital admissions
- Total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area

Low	Medium	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines• Get tested if you have symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions• Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines• Get tested if you have symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wear a mask indoors in public• Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines• Get tested if you have symptoms• Additional precautions may be needed for people at high risk for severe illness

Please see the [link](#) for an example script to send to your community members.

COVID-19 VACCINATION

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends everyone 6 months and older receive a COVID-19 vaccine (5).

To promote vaccination, churches can:

- Encourage members to get vaccinated as soon as they can
- Host information sessions to connect members with information about the COVID-19 vaccine
- Start a Vaccine Ambassador Program
- Host a vaccination clinic: contact your local Pennsylvania Department of Health Community Health Organizer to coordinate your event
- Share information for local vaccination locations or events
- Offer vaccine incentives such as generic gift cards, grocery store vouchers, or gas cards. Resources for incentives can be found here:
 - United Way of Pennsylvania Live Grant
- Have congregation members that are doctors/nurses give testimony about the crisis
- Avoid any sermons on how God will protect us from COVID-19. Instead focus on our actions and role in the world to combat sin and reconcile us to him.



VACCINE AMBASSADOR

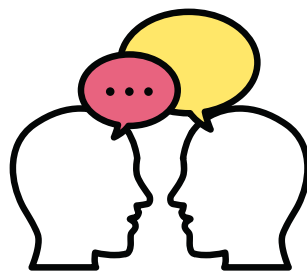
Faith leaders have a unique opportunity to promote vaccine trust and increase accessibility. Vaccine ambassadors train community members to disseminate important health information. They are most effective when they are trusted community members and share similar beliefs and characteristics with their peers (2).

Talking to Your Congregation

- Start from a place of empathy and understanding
- Acknowledge getting vaccinated is a personal decision
- State clearly what we do and do not know
- Focus on the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine
- After talking, let them know you are open to continuing the conversation, and encourage them to take at least one step

Below are some examples of starting your own vaccine ambassador program.

- [John Hopkins Virtual Course](#)
- [COVID-19 Faith in the Vaccine Ambassador Program](#)
- [Atrium Health Vaccine Ambassador Program](#)
- [San Francisco Department of Public Health Vaccine Ambassador Training](#)



There are many platforms available for being able to host a virtual church service. This can be used as a way to encourage members to stay home if they or someone else in their family is sick.

Benefits of church streaming services

- Reach people who are homebound due to illness or injury or who lack transportation
- Help members who are traveling and want to continue to participate in their own faith community
- Extend reach beyond the local community and help people connect with one another

Some platforms that can be used are

- Zoom
- Dacast
- Vimeo Premium
- BoxCast
- ChurchStreaming.TV



PRAYERS FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY COVID-19

Join together with your church community to pray for those affected by COVID-19. This can range from people infected with COVID-19 or families impacted by COVID-19. Below are some example prayers to share within your church community.

- Coronavirus liturgy and prayer resources
- Prayers for people affected by the coronavirus
- Prayers during the coronavirus pandemic

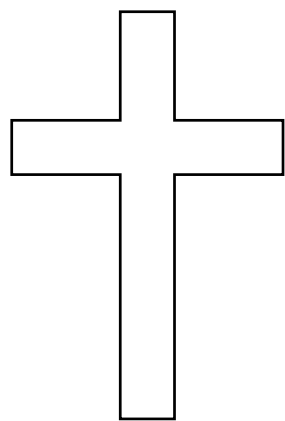


¹⁴MEMORIALIZE MEMBERS WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID-19

Memorializing church members is a method to share remembrances of loved ones lost to the coronavirus pandemic, and to encourage public health measures that can prevent more deaths in the future.

Ideas to memorialize lost members include:

- Virtual vigils, streamed live on your website or Facebook
- Websites that collate the names and photos of those who died
- Video projections of those we have lost
- A tree of loss
- If the family allows it, share when losses are from COVID-19



FAITH SPECIFIC EDUCATION RESOURCES

Below are some resources that you can share within your congregation if they want more information on COVID-19 or the COVID-19 vaccines.

- [Stem cells and the vaccine](#)
- [Mark of the Beast video](#)
- [Should Christians Take the Vaccine video](#)
- [Should Pro-Lifers be Pro-Vaccine](#)
- [Pastor's Toolkit videos](#)
- [Pope Francis video](#)
- [COVID-19 Faith Resources](#)
- [Faith in Vaccines Toolkit](#)



MENTAL HEALTH

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five U.S. adults experiences mental illness. Only 45% of adults with a mental illness will get treatment in any given year. Churches can assist members with their basic mental health needs.

- Awareness: Acknowledging that the outside world has likely caused many of our mental illnesses and that individuals are not alone in their struggles.
- Belief: Believe that the Bible has something to offer to those struggling with mental illnesses and the church.
- Challenge: Reading the Bible to discover both sides of the mental health battle will be important, as looking for the truth is key to assuring mental health.



How church leaders can help with mental health needs in the church

- Promote awareness by educating the members of your communities and congregations about mental health issues through educational forums and other opportunities
 - Invite local mental health experts— to provide workshops on stress management, isolation, anxiety, depression or other topics of interest.
 - Share facts and common myths about mental health
 - Organize additional meetings, dinners, or other gathering for members or the larger community to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness
- Promote acceptance of those with mental health issues
 - Talk about your own mental health openly
 - Encourage and express empathy in your family, congregation, and community. Convey a message of nonviolence, acceptance, and compassion
 - Be an example of taking good care of your mental health by making mental wellness a priority in your personal life
- Start a spiritual support group in your faith community for people with mental health challenges and their families

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