

UUCSV COVID-19 Policies and Procedures

(Last updated 2/21/23)

Current status/updates:

As of 2/21/23, at least 1 county served by UUCSV is considered “medium risk” per CDC COVID Data Tracker.

The board met on 2/19/23 and approved a plan to allow for “masking optional” when the surrounding five county area is at “low” transmission level per CDC tracker. Please watch signs on doors for status. Please stay at home if you recently had COVID and have symptoms, and continue to mask if you have recently had COVID (i.e. last 2 weeks) or had known exposure to COVID.

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view?list_select_state=Pennsylvania&data-type=CommunityLevels

We have been successful with hybrid services throughout most of the past year and will continue to keep the church “open” with appropriate safety precautions while also continuing to share services with Zoom. This allows members to gauge their comfort level and decide if they would like to attend services in-person or attend via Zoom.

This policy is informed by recommendations from the CDC, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the UUA and is subject to change as the pandemic continues to unfold.

Policies have been crafted with input from our congregation with UU principles in mind: Our goal is to provide services to the best of our ability in a safe and welcoming environment to all members of our congregation. There are individuals who are immunosuppressed and unable to mount an immune response to vaccination, and individuals who may lack internet access. Equity and inclusivity are key to our mission, and we will do our best to provide services for all members safely.

Who do these policies apply to? These policies and procedures apply to members and non-member guests attending the UUCSV church building.

Who may gather at the church? The board believes that in-person gatherings can be done safely in the UUCSV church if all safety precautions listed below are followed.

Services - We will offer hybrid services and will continue to refine our approach to best serve our community.

How many people may gather at the church? The Board will continue to abide by any CDC or state recommendations for any in-person meetings. **At this time there are no specific limitations.**

At this time, the board has decided that in-person gatherings can be done safely in the UUCSV church, if all safety precautions listed below are followed.

In the case of a new variant and/or spike in COVID-19 or other communicable diseases, the Board reserves the right to suspend large in-person gatherings (i.e. >25 people).

General Safety precautions for hybrid services (regardless of COVID risk levels)

1 - Vaccination

We strongly recommend that all individuals who are eligible for vaccination to be vaccinated for communicable diseases, (e.g. COVID-19 and influenza) to maintain as safe of an environment as possible for in-person activities. Although COVID-19 infection does provide some immunity, neither infection nor vaccination provide lasting immunity. Thus, we strongly encourage and trust members to stay up to date with COVID-19 and other vaccinations, per CDC recommendations.

Because of their close interaction with others, all employees of the congregation (Minister, RGL Director, Administrator, and Music Director) as well as volunteers conducting business on behalf of the congregation or official programs of the congregation (e.g. RGL classes, small group ministry, hospitality, pastoral care) **are required** to be vaccinated for COVID-19 per CDC recommendations for their age and level of risk.

We require all children to receive recommended vaccinations per Pennsylvania school recommendations. This does not currently include COVID-19 vaccination, though we do strongly encourage COVID-19 vaccination. This policy takes into account the fact that the vast majority have some level of immunity due to either vaccination or prior infection. In the spirit of inclusiveness, children can come to services as long as they abide by all precautions recommended by the CDC (masking if age 2 or older, handwashing/sanitizing).

2 - Self-screening for COVID-19 symptoms

Individuals who have any symptoms that could be due to COVID-19 infection or were recently exposed to COVID-19 must stay at home. At-home or clinic testing for COVID-19 is strongly encouraged if an individual was recently exposed or infected. Free tests are available through the PA Dept of Health.

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Public%20Testing.aspx>

We recommend members to stay away from the church for 5 days after exposure and continue to mask up to 2 weeks after infection, to be conservative. *(CDC recommends quarantine for 5 days followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days.)*

Symptoms of COVID-19 infection can range from no symptoms to fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea.

Close contact to COVID-19 means being within 6 feet of someone who is showing symptoms of COVID-19 or an infected person who shows no symptoms but later tests positive for COVID-19.

3 - Social distancing

Social distancing can help prevent/reduce transmission if someone has asymptomatic infection due to COVID-19 or other viruses. Social distancing is still encouraged in general, but at the discretion of our members.

4 - Cleaning/disinfection

Weekly cleaning will be performed by a professional cleaner with special focus on high-touch areas (door handles, bathroom, sink areas) and vacuuming every other week.

5 - Air filtration systems - We have a forced air system with 4 overhead units with recently replaced air filters. We do not believe that air filtration by itself would be enough to ensure safety, which is why we have all the other measures in place. When it is warmer, we will try to open windows as possible to allow for air circulation.

6 – Contact tracing - We will do our best to keep our congregation safe and follow PA Dept of Health guidance. If a congregant is diagnosed with COVID19 and had been recently in a group meeting at the church, we will notify the PA Dept of Health and will follow their instructions; official contact tracing would be done by them. We will close the church temporarily for an additional cleaning and follow PA Dept of Health guidance (see Q&A below for if a member becomes infected).

COVID precautions in the setting of COVID risk of “medium” or higher in any of our surrounding 5 county area

1 - masking and handwashing/hand sanitizer - mandatory upon entry if COVID risk level is “medium” or higher in any of the 5 surrounding counties

2 - Food/drinks - permitted at the end of the service if COVID risk level is “medium” or higher in any of the 5 surrounding counties. This allows churchgoers the choice to stay or leave prior to the start of coffee hour.

FAQ about hybrid reopening services

Q: Why have hybrid services at all?

A: Having a Zoom option is necessary because some people are unable to mount an immune response to vaccination (i.e. undergoing chemotherapy, on chronic immunosuppression), or may feel that any risk of COVID-19 is unacceptable. There are also individuals who do not have internet access or may have difficulty with virtual services for various reasons. The hybrid option allows for everyone to decide what is best for themselves and their families.

Q: I'm vaccinated; why do I still have to wear a mask indoors during service (when COVID risk is high)?

A: While vaccination reduces the risk of severe infection, you can still be infected with COVID-19 and be infectious. Asymptomatic spread is possible, and so we believe it is in the best interest of the congregation to continue to wear masks while indoors to protect ourselves and loved ones who may remain at higher risk.

Earlier during the pandemic (July 2021), University of California San Francisco hospitals had been testing everyone who walked in the door and discovered a 2% COVID-positive rate among those who had no symptoms for COVID-19—even though San Francisco has among the country's highest vaccination rates.

Let's imagine that 2% of our congregation could be walking around with asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic COVID-19. If 50 people meet for services, that could be possibly 1 person on average who might have asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic COVID-19 and could spread the disease. If we are doing everything correctly--staying home when we feel sick or have a known exposure to COVID-19, washing hands frequently, wearing masks during services--we can minimize that risk. While **you** may not feel like the risk is sufficient to wear a mask, others who could carry an infection home to their loved ones who may be at risk may feel differently. So please wear a mask when COVID risk is medium or higher during services.

Q: Is it possible to still be infected by the virus while vaccinated, with a mask on, and physically distanced 6 feet?

A: While the vaccine offers protection and is much better than not being vaccinated, it is still possible to be infected and some variants such as Omicron are particularly infectious. This may be due to the variant itself, or to protection from the vaccine wearing off. Thus, (when COVID risk is medium or higher in our area), it is important to wear a mask as an extra level of protection. They have to be worn correctly, and the type of mask does matter. Well-fitting N-95 masks work better than surgical masks which work better than cloth masks. N-95 or KN95 masks are now available, unlike earlier in the pandemic.

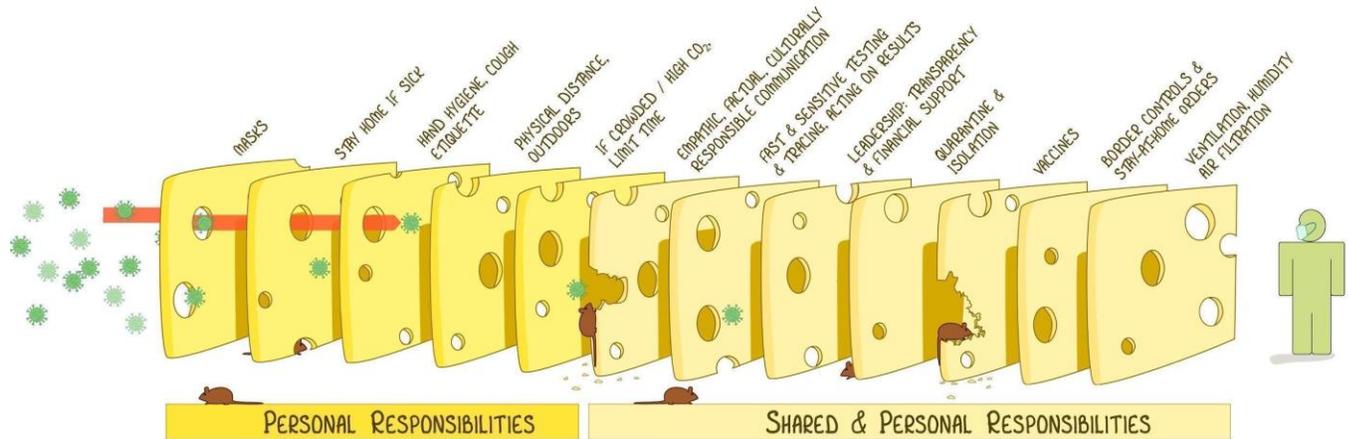
Q: Is 3 feet, 6 feet, or 10 feet enough distance (in times of medium or higher COVID risk)?

A: With more distance, the less likely a virus particle could be close enough to someone else to infect them. The CDC has been using 6 feet as a general guideline, but some people may feel that 10-12 feet is more appropriate. Technically, if you had COVID-19 and sneezed without a mask on, you could deliver the virus quite far. We will do our best and encourage members to optimize distancing when attending hybrid services or any group meetings in person.

Below is my favorite image from the pandemic illustrating the various levels of protection against the virus. Together, these measures can help prevent spread and ensure that individuals who would like to have some form of in-person meeting can continue to do so at UUCSV as much as possible.

THE SWISS CHEESE RESPIRATORY VIRUS PANDEMIC DEFENCE

RECOGNISING THAT NO SINGLE INTERVENTION IS PERFECT AT PREVENTING SPREAD



EACH INTERVENTION (SLICE) HAS IMPERFECTIONS (HOLES) WHICH CHANGE IN SIZE, NUMBER AND POSITION DEPENDING ON HOW THE INTERVENTION IS ROLLED OUT.

MULTIPLE LAYERS IMPROVE SUCCESS.

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IAN M THACKRY
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WITH THANKS TO JODY LANARD, KATHRINE ARDEN & THE UNI OF GLD
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VERSION 4.3
UPDATE: 04SEPT2021