



OYO STATE COVID-19 TASK FORCE

ADVISORY FOR RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

Mass gatherings such as religious services are highly visible events with the potential for serious public health consequences if they are not planned and managed carefully. Mass gatherings have been known to amplify the spread of infectious diseases including coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Given the rapid evolution and global transmission of coronavirus, organisers of religious gatherings must ensure that adequate preparations are in place before, during, and after such gatherings to prevent or mitigate the spread of the virus. Religious events are best held outdoors or in well-ventilated halls or rooms with provision for adequate spacing to limit contact.

It is important that before events and meetings hold, organizers should assess the safety of people attending the event. They can also modify their events to reduce risks of spreading diseases.

The leadership of the various religious houses should ensure that *physical distancing measures* are used to reduce close contact among people during the gathering e.g. by *providing more entry and exit points* and *ensuring well-spaced seating or standing arrangements*. They should also ensure that adequate ensuring handwashing facilities (with soap and running water) are readily available at entry and exit points.

Key requirements for reopening

1. Ensure that church or mosque workers are properly briefed/trained about new guidelines
2. Remove commonly shared items like prayer books and mats
3. Provide piped water for adequate hand washing stations (one station to twenty worshippers)
4. Post signs on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and preventive behaviours in conspicuous places
5. Post signs at entrance prohibiting entrance without face masks
6. Mark out prayer areas for each individual mats or put marks on seating arrangements (at least 2meters apart)
7. Clearly calculate 25% of the maximum capacity of your worship centre as the new allowable maximum
8. Develop a schedule of increased, routine cleaning and disinfection of all structures and materials
9. Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 during service
10. Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick at the facility to their homes or a healthcare facility.
11. Designate a staff person to be responsible for screening and responding to COVID-19 concerns
12. Provide temperature scanners for screening at all entry points
13. Ensure rooms have adequate ventilation and proper air circulation (outdoor events are preferable)
14. Waste management facilities should be provided and sanitary disposal ensured
15. For Islamic houses of worship, we recommend that ablutions should be done from home.
16. We recommend that children should be with their parents. However, where special arrangements can be made, classes for children aged 7 years and above can be arranged



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provided social distancing is strictly enforced and the teachers are well trained in COVID-19 prevention. Any unwell child should stay away from places of worship.

PRE-EVENT ACTIVITIES

1. The following information must be provided to attendees *before* meetings or services:
 - Advice on regular and thorough washing of hands with soap under running water or use of alcohol-based hand -sanitizer
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
 - Avoid shaking hands, hugging and any other form of physical contact
 - Please stay at home if you feel ill with fever, cough or breathing difficulties
 - Cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze (organizers can provide this) and dispose of the tissues immediately
 - Ensure you wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose during the time you are within the churches and mosques
 - Do not come to the religious gathering if you have just traveled from a high-risk region, have had contact with a confirmed case, or have been exposed to the virus.
 - Vulnerable individuals such as those aged 65 years and above, those with impaired immune systems (e.g. HIV, cancer treatment) and other co-morbidities such as diabetes and heart disease are advised to stay at home and consider remote participation such as online service
2. The maximum capacity of the venue for the gathering must be predetermined before the event/meeting/ service and efforts must be made to adhere to it
3. Religious leaders must identify practices that aid the transmission of the virus and modify them appropriately. These include vigorous singing, shouting, sharing of materials, shared use of microphone etc. This must be communicated to the worshippers.
4. Plan worship not to exceed one (01) hour. Multiple sessions (with at least 30 minutes in between) are encouraged, but disinfection must be done after each session.
5. Microphone **boomers should be removed after each user and disinfected with 70% alcohol spray.**
6. Preparations should be made to recruit and train personnel on implementing and enforcing infection Prevention (IPC) measures or protocols such as
 - Screening of attendees for signs of illness
 - Crowd control measures at entry and exit points or in case of spillovers beyond the capacity of the venue
 - Emergency response protocols for sick people



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- Seating/standing arrangements
- Routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, floors, doorknobs, etc

DURING EVENT OR GATHERING

- Religious organizations should provide temperature scanners to be used for temperature screening at entry points. People with symptoms such as cough and fever should **NOT BE ALLOWED** into the premises.
- **All houses of worship and religious meeting places must be re arranged to accommodate 25% of the former capacity**
- **For churches that use plastic or leather chairs arranged singly, the spaces between chairs should comfortably seat 2 chairs, before, behind and on both sides.**
- **Churches that use pews must seat a maximum of three people on a long pew and only two on a short pew i.e., enough space to sit three people between each person**
- Everyone attending the religious event must wear a mask or ensure that the nose and mouth are properly covered.
- Ensure provision of adequate hand washing facilities including running water, soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Efforts should be made to capture the contact details of all attendees e.g., asking them to fill attendance online or to drop a small slip containing their contact details
- Organizers should provide adequate human resources (who should be equipped with required PPE) who will be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting communal places such as ablution areas, all floors, toilets, and surfaces such as door handles, chairs and church benches with disinfectant or soap
- Organizers should provide adequate waste management facilities such as closed trash cans so that people dispose of tissue and other waste properly
- Organizers should review practices that put their congregations at risk (e.g. sharing a communal cup, receiving the holy communion on the tongue, shaking hands)
- No sharing of books or hymnals or testaments; each congregant or attendee should bring theirs or watch projections on screens

MEASURES AFTER RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

1. The venue of the gathering must be disinfected immediately after the event.
2. All attendees must disperse in an orderly and efficient manner *immediately after services* while maintaining physical distancing
3. The religious leaders must also set up a notification system so that anyone who is confirmed as a COVID-19 case after attending a gathering can reach out to them



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4. Religious organizations must set up mechanisms of reaching out to members to communicate risks and exposures, preventive measures and facilitate testing of members who may become exposed as a result of attending religious gatherings

Disinfection and cleaning

Disinfect frequently touched surfaces with household bleach (3.5% or 5% Sodium Hypochlorite). If concentration is 3.5%, dilute bleach with water in ratio of 1:6, if concentration is 5%, dilute to 1:10. Disinfectant sprays with at least 70% alcohol can also be used to wipe or spray surfaces. Wash floors and conveniences frequently and disinfect with strong disinfectants like Lysol, Izal and Dettol.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR CLARIFICATION

Please contact, Oyo State Emergency Operations Centre on the following numbers
08095394000, 08095863000, 08078288999, 08078288800



First Quarter 2020. Credit: Empowerment Worship Center



Same church awaiting re-opening, June 2020. Credit: Empowerment Worship Centre



Physical distancing in a Mosque



Hand washing stations at the entrance to a church