

Guidance for Healthy Church Teams on What to Do in a Covid-19 Resurgence

November 25, 2020

The Back to In-Person Worship Work Group developed the Technical Assistance Manual (“TAM”) to enable churches to navigate the realities of returning to in-person worship in the midst of a major pandemic. On November 13, 2020, Governor Northam amended Executive Order 67 and he limited public gatherings to 25 or fewer people based on the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Virginia. Even though worship services are exempted from the governor’s order, the Work Group, along with the Cabinet, would like to offer some questions to help local Healthy Church Teams (“HCTs”) think through your response to increasing infection rates in your area.

(Please note that this does not take the place of the procedures you should take in the case of an actual COVID exposure situation. Please contact your District Superintendent if that situation arises.)

Not all areas of Virginia are suffering from the same increase in COVID-19 cases so responses to the questions below will vary based on locality. How should your team respond? Here’s a suggested process:

1. First, review the current TAM, found at vaumc.org/return. Is your church following all of the TAM?
2. Second, review the Mission and Ministry guidelines also found at vaumc.org/MM/. Is your church in compliance with these for any applicable programs in your church? Most Mission and Ministry programs will be limited to 25 or fewer based on amended EO 67.
3. Investigate the prevailing infection rates in your area as a piece of your considerations. The following tools present a lot of information. Explore the metrics for your area, remembering that members of your community may be working in other areas. COVID-19 antigen or PCR test positivity rates of 10% or above are often considered a key indicator of significant virus spread (see [Locality Metrics](#)).¹ Similarly, the county level color shadings on the [Georgia Institute of Technology tool](#) offer a relative indicator of risk. Hospital bed use rates in your region may also be an important consideration.
 - a. [COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Tool - Georgia Institute of Technology](#)
 - b. [Explore your COVID-19 Risk Level - Brown School of Public Health](#)
 - c. [COVID-19 Projections - Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington](#)

¹ To find positivity rates and other current statistics for a particular city or county on the Locality Metrics web page, scroll down to “Individual Metrics Burden and Trend” and choose a locality from the dropdown menu.

- d. [Locality Metrics - Virginia Department of Health](#)
 - e. [Effective Reproduction Rate, Virginia — Rt Live](#)
4. What are the unique circumstances of your local church situation?
 - a. Are there particularly vulnerable people?
 - b. Are there technology limitations that hinder online worship participation?
 - c. Are there other unique circumstances?
 5. Consider the following with your team:
 - a. Should we be doing any in-person worship at this time, given what we know and the direction of infection in our area?
 - b. Should we be doing mission & ministry at this time, given what we know and the direction of infection in our area?
 - c. Are there mission and ministry programs excluded from amended EO 67 because those programs provide “access to essential services for low-income residents, such as food banks”? (As of November 17, 2020, this has been interpreted by the Governor’s office as allowing homeless shelters and food pantries.)
 - d. If the answer to any of the questions in 5 a-c is yes, under what circumstances will we consider:
 - i. limiting the numbers of participants in worship?
 - ii. changing our current mode of worship?
 - iii. increasing the number of worship services to keep worship attendance lower?
 - iv. limiting mission and ministry events?
 - e. Decide together under what circumstances the answer to 5 a or b becomes no. What kind of infection rate, spread, or other data point might signal that it is time to reconsider or suspend in-person gatherings at our church?
 6. Your District Superintendent is a resource for your team and may have valuable feedback. Stay in communication with him/her.
 7. The annual conference work groups (Back to In-Person Worship and Mission & Ministry) continue to assess the TAM and other guidelines based on overall Virginia infection rates and may make further modifications.
 8. Write up your decisions and communicate them to your church.
 9. Re-evaluate at least monthly.