

November 22, 2021

Health Advisory Panel Guidance for the Holiday Season

As we approach the holiday season, many have asked for updated guidance regarding COVID-19 protocols for worship, formation, and fellowship events.

Our Health Advisory Panel met last week with Bishop Susan and noted that after a brief decline in COVID-19 cases over the past month or so, some areas of the Commonwealth are again beginning to see a slight surge. **Health professionals anticipate that the coming colder weather, combined with holiday gatherings, will present an environment in which we can expect COVID-19 infections to increase.** To that end, when we gather for worship, formation, and fellowship, we should continue to exercise precautionary practices.

We are pleased to note that throughout the time of COVID-19, no churches have reported wide-spread COVID-19 outbreaks connected with any worship events. Each church has enacted its own COVID-19 protocols and parishioners have followed them faithfully. In the event that there have been any positive cases, churches have responded appropriately and kept parishioners safe. We are deeply grateful for your care and your faithfulness.

As we enter the winter months and celebrate our Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, we should continue to follow the protocols we have each put in place.

Congregations should develop and adjust protocols based on:

- their local context
- the percent positivity rate in their area
- the number of cases per 100,000

Percent positivity rates over 8% and daily cases per 100,000 over 25 are considered risky. At this writing, the current percent positivity in the Commonwealth of Virginia is 5.6% and the daily average number of cases per 100,000 is 17.8. To follow this data for your own locality, please visit the Virginia Department of Health COVID-19 [website](#).

The Health Advisory Panel recommends:

- continuing to wear masks when indoors, especially when singing
- continuing to observe physical distancing
- for fellowship events, serving individually wrapped refreshments and/or wearing gloves when serving

Communion must be in one kind only or offered through the use of hermetically sealed bread/wine packages. We frequently receive questions about the Common Chalice. Bishop Haynes anticipates that once we are through the winter and cases begin to decline again, the common cup may return. This will be something to anticipate as we approach Easter.

We are grateful for the faithfulness with which congregations have cared for each other throughout the pandemic. Together, we have acted out of our baptismal promises to care for all and to continue in the breaking of the bread, even if we have had to adjust to new practices to do so. Together, we are “weathering the storm” of this pandemic, and together we put our trust in God who is guiding us to re-emerge. God is doing a new thing in our churches – let us awake, and rise to embrace the life and blessing He now offers!

Psalm 33:18-22:

Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him, on those who wait upon his love,

To pluck their lives from death, and to feed them in time of famine.

Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

Indeed, our heart rejoices in him, for in his holy Name we put our trust.

Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, as we have put our trust in you.