

The Safe Operating Task Force has met regularly since May to consider safety guidelines for all our operations during the pandemic. They have consulted on how we might gather indoors during the pandemic.

During the warmer months, we have tried to maximize opportunities for gathering outside, knowing that indoor gatherings pose a greater public health risk. We will continue to offer remote options for worship and fellowship throughout the winter, including a new livestream option for the worship broadcast.

Our plans are based on the current knowledge of how Covid-19 spreads, and how we can reduce those risks.

1. Covid-19 is spread both by people with symptoms and by people who have no symptoms.

- People with symptoms must not enter St. John's, but everyone must take precautions as if they are contagious.

2. Covid-19 is spread by respiratory droplets. That risk can be significantly reduced by wearing masks that cover the nose and mouth, and staying at least 6 feet apart.

- We will have limited capacity for indoor worship, requiring that all indoor services be by RSVP. We will prioritize the attendance of those directly involved in worship rites of the day (such as affirmation of baptism, remembrance of the saints, or music leadership).
- We will wear masks 100% of the time in the building. The only exceptions, per state guidelines, are for children under 2, and for those leading the service, where we will maintain even greater distance.
- We will sit in household units, and ushers will help us maintain proper distance, and dismiss us after the service so that exits are not crowded as we leave.
- Participants will need to arrive 10 minutes early so that everyone can be seated safely.
- We will not share Holy Communion.
- Ushers will be trained to enforce the guidelines.

3. Covid-19 can be spread from surfaces, but that is a smaller risk.

- We will disinfect door handles and frequently touched pew surfaces between services.
- Hymnals have been removed and we use printed service folders.

4. Covid-19 can be spread by aerosol (tiny particles that float throughout an enclosed space.). This risk depends on the amount of time spent in the space and the amount of aerosol in the air. Singing is especially likely to create aerosols. Being outside is much safer. The degree of risk from aerosol is still debated by experts.

- Our air filtration system has been upgraded, but it is not possible to eliminate or quantify the risk.
- The congregation will not sing during services at this time. Cantors/soloists will wear masks.
- We will not linger inside before or after services, or have refreshments or fellowship activities at this time.
- We will not have back-to-back services, but will allow time between building uses.

5. Covid-19 is much more dangerous for older people and those with chronic health conditions, but it is not free of risk for anyone. The risk of severe illness varies, but young and healthy people can catch and transmit the virus at the same rate.

- We will use the same protocols for all people, understanding that our actions impact the larger community beyond our congregation.

6. Vaccines are becoming available, but it will be some months before enough of our community is inoculated to gain herd immunity. Best evidence shows that those who have recovered from infection, or those who have completed a vaccination series, are at little or no risk of a new COVID-19 infection, at least in the short term. In addition, they appear to present little or no risk to others (although scientists are still studying how completely vaccination prevents asymptomatic spread.)

The appearance of new, more infectious strains of the virus is also under careful study. At this time, the available vaccines are felt to be protective.

- Vaccinated individuals will be urged to follow the same social distancing guidelines when interacting with anyone outside their household. Wearing masks and maintaining six feet of distance will be expected of everyone.