



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of Communications

Catholic Center • 11625 Old St. Augustine Road • Jacksonville, Florida • 32258
Phone: (904) 262.3200 • Fax: (904) 262.2398 • www.dosafl.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Guidance for Parishes and Diocesan Administrative Offices to Plan and Respond to COVID-19

The weekend of Jan. 8-9, Florida added more than 126,000 new COVID-19 cases pushing Florida's total to more than 4.75 million since the pandemic began, according to figures released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The recent surge in COVID-19 cases has been attributed to the rapid-spreading omicron variant of the virus and an increase in people getting tested.

Bishop Felipe Estévez gathered his team of advisors to review the *Update to the COVID-19 Safety Plan for the Diocese of St. Augustine* released last August, taking into consideration the recent CDC recommendations and local government mandates. “Our goal, the bishop said, is to effectively manage and minimize exposure to the COVID-19 virus and help mitigate the spread of the virus in the community.”

The new *Guidance for Parishes and Diocesan Administrative Offices to Plan and Respond to COVID-19* was effective Jan. 15, 2022. It accompanies this statement.

The takeaways of the guidelines, shared with clergy this week, are to maintain safety in our parishes and offices and encourage people to get vaccinated and boosted, maintain physical distance, wear a mask, and get tested.

- It is **strongly recommended** that face masks be worn by all. Ushers should make masks available to parishioners who wish to use one.
- Those with serious health conditions should consult their physician before attending Mass and gatherings where contact with others puts them at risk.
- Anyone who is ill should stay home.
- All churches and offices, when in use, must be cleaned and disinfected daily. A thorough and repeated cleaning of high-contact surfaces and objects should be maintained.
- Parishioners wishing to receive Communion on the tongue should go to the end of the Communion line. The Host should be given by the priest or deacon only, and they must sanitize their hands and fingers between each communicant to avoid contamination.

- Parishes are encouraged to continue livestreaming Mass if possible and regularly communicate safety measures via parish communication channels.

Understanding that various factors (e.g., building design and configuration, demographics, etc.) make every parish unique, applying these guidelines to parish programs and events is subject to the pastor's discretion.

The Risk Management Office will continue providing weekly updates to parishes based on the CDC's *COVID Data Tracker* and *Community Transmission Scale*.

Christian charity and the common good should prevail. By working together, we can help minimize the spread of the virus and hope to return to normalcy soon.

Please consult your parish for details on the implementation of these guidelines. For more details about the guidelines, email Deborah Tauro, director of Risk Management, at dtauro@dosafl.com.

Last updated Jan. 18, 2022



**"Guidance for Parishes and Diocesan Administrative Offices
to Plan and Respond to COVID-19"
Effective January 15, 2022**

Purpose:

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and its variants are a worldwide pandemic. Since the onset of the virus in early 2020, we have struggled to adapt and follow the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance as the situation changes. This document will be updated as the CDC guidance changes.

The purpose of this document is to guide administrators, pastors, and staff of the Diocese of St. Augustine in managing and preventing exposures to the COVID-19 virus and helping to mitigate the community's spread of the virus. This document includes guidelines from the CDC and any known state and local government mandates.

Working together, we can help minimize the spread of this virus and hope to return to normalcy.

Preparing and Protecting the Workplace:

To prepare the workplace to combat this virus – we have provided disinfecting wipes, disinfectant spray, and hand sanitizer in the Catholic Center and the Father Felix Varela Center for employee use in their workspace and common areas.

COVID-19 is an airborne virus. It can be detectable on porous surfaces (paper or fabric) for up to three hours and hard surfaces (plastic, wood, stainless steel) for up to three days. Therefore, it is recommended that shared spaces be wiped down daily to help prevent spread. Variants are more infectious and travel farther – so regularly changing filters or opening windows will minimize this effect.

Employees and the Workplace:

Employees are encouraged to adhere to the following guidelines while in the workplace. Don't hesitate to contact Human Resources (Janice Muñoz, email jmunoz@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200) if you have any questions regarding paid sick time or time under quarantine.

- Practice safety measures to mitigate the spread of the virus:
 - Wear a mask (covering your nose and mouth) when in shared spaces and unable to a safe distance (6 feet).
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing – immediately throw the tissue away.
 - Wash your hands OFTEN for at least 20 seconds with soap and water
 - Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. At least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with your hands.
- Employees who have symptoms should notify their supervisor and stay home. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. The following chart is based on information from the CDC.

Symptoms	Cold	Flu	COVID-19
Fever	Rare	High (100-102F) 3-4 days	Common – mild to serious
Headache	Rare	Intense	Can be present
General Aches and Pains	Slight	Usual-often severe	Can be present
Fatigue, Weakness	Mild	Intense- 2-3 Weeks	Can be present
Extreme Exhaustion	Never	Usual	Can be present
New loss of taste or smell	Never	Rare	Can be present
Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes	Has been reported
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes	Has been reported
Sore Throat	Common	Common	Has been reported
Cough	Mild to moderate	Common	Common
Shortness of Breath	Rare	Rare	In more serious infections

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

- **When to Seek Emergency Medical Attention.**

Look for emergency warning signs* for COVID-19. If someone is showing any of these signs, **seek emergency medical care immediately**:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone
- This list does not cover all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for other severe or concerning symptoms.
- Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility: Notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.
- Employees who are well but have a sick family member or have come in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and:
 - If fully vaccinated, including boosters, or tested positive in the last 90-days with a positive viral test.
 - Wear a mask around others for ten days of the last contact.
 - Get tested at least five days after contact. Note: The five-day counter starts ON the day of exposure.
 - There is no need to quarantine
 - If not fully vaccinated (including booster) or have had the Johnson & Johnson vaccine more than two months ago.
 - Stay home for at least five days after the last contact.
 - Wear a mask when around others.
 - If you test negative at five days, you do not need to quarantine and should wear a mask around others for an additional five days.
 - Do not travel during the quarantine period.
- Employees who test positive should contact and follow the guidance of their healthcare provider.
 - Notify your supervisor of the results and if positive, advise them of any other individuals with whom you have been in contact within the workplace.
 - Your supervisor will notify Human Resources (Janis Muñoz, email jmunoz@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200), and Risk Management

- (Deborah Tauro, email dtauro@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200). Stay at home and separate yourself from other people in your home.
- Quarantine for at least five days after the date of the positive test.
 - Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, etc., with others in your home.
 - Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces in your home.
 - Follow your doctor's advice – Notify your supervisor if you are hospitalized. Your supervisor should notify Human Resources (Janice Muñoz, email jmunoz@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200), and Risk Management (Deborah Tauro, email dtauro@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200).
 - Obtain a return-to-work authorization from your healthcare provider before returning to the workplace. Provide to your supervisor and Human Resources (Janis Muñoz, email jmunoz@dosafl.com).
- CDC is issuing guidelines for travel. These guidelines can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Maintaining a Healthy Workplace:

- In the event an employee tests positive, all employees working directly with them and exposed within the past five days should quarantine for five days if they experience any symptoms and get tested at the end of the five days.
- At the time an employee tests positive, they should quarantine another five days or until their doctor says they may return to work.
- please get in touch with Risk Management (Deborah Tauro, email dtauro@dosafl.com or call (904) 262-3200) for guidance on proper cleaning and disinfecting before reopening the building.
- Workers Compensation – illness from COVID-19 is not considered an Occupational Disease and should be filed under your health insurance.

HOW DOES THE STATE DEFINE AN OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE?

440.151(2) Whenever used in this section, the term "occupational disease" shall be construed to mean only a disease which is due to causes and conditions which are characteristic of and peculiar to a particular trade, occupation, process, or employment, and to exclude all ordinary diseases of life to which the general public is exposed, unless the incidence of the disease is substantially higher in the particular trade, occupation, process, or employment than for the general public. "Occupational disease" means only a disease for which there are epidemiological studies showing that exposure to the specific substance involved, at the levels to which the employee was exposed, may cause the precise disease sustained by the employee.

- When working in the building:
 - All employees should clean and disinfect their work area and surrounding common areas DAILY.
 - Maintain 6-ft. safe distancing
 - Wear a mask when unable to maintain safe distancing.
 - Wash your hands regularly
- State and Local Advisements and the Diocese:
 - Office Operations – Catholic Center, Father Felix Varela Center
 - Offices are currently open to the public.
 - Unvaccinated staff are encouraged to maintain a safe distance and wear masks when unable to do so.
 - Keep your workspace clean – cleaning and disinfecting should include phones, keyboards, computer mice, desks, chairs, file cabinets, etc. Use only your office phone.
 - Parish Operations:
 - For Mass Operations: As we stay abreast and adapt to the ever-changing status and guidelines related to COVID-19, we are “staying the course” in continuing to follow CDC guidelines. The CDC’s COVID Data Tracker (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>) is tracking policies and advice based on the *Community Transmission Scale*, which uses vaccination and case data to determine a county’s Community Transmission Scale. To simplify our tracking and better reflect CDC guidance, we use the Community Transmission Scale to determine phases for managing our COVID-19 safety posture within the diocese.

- The CDC's Community Transmission Scale uses the following categories:

 High Substantial Moderate Low No Data

- We will tie this into our Phases as indicated below – and if there are changes in the scale for a county, the restrictions indicated below will apply.
 - Phase Four – LOW**
 - No restrictions (Precious Blood and physical Sign of Peace omitted)
 - Phase Three – MODERATE**
 - Large Choirs are restricted as safe distancing is not possible, and masks are not worn while singing.
 - Phase Two – SUBSTANTIAL**
 - Cease passing collection baskets. Alternatives may be using baskets with handles, placing baskets at entrances, or having ushers hold baskets at exits after Mass.
 - Phase One – HIGH**
 - Implement Safe Distancing
 - Masks to be worn by clergy during processions and during Communion, altar servers during processions, ushers and offertory, and all processions.

The following items are best practices and should be continued:

We encourage all to be vaccinated and stay home if they are ill or have severe underlying conditions.

- Social Distancing:
 - Those with serious health conditions should consult their physician before attending gatherings where contact with others puts them at risk.

- Masks:
 - The wearing of masks by all is strongly recommended. Because not all staff/parishioners are vaccinated (for COVID-19), some people may have other conditions requiring them to use a mask (such as underlying medical conditions).
 - In parish communications or bulletins, avoid any language that associates mask-wearing with anything but a health concern. Christian charity prevails for the common good, especially in church.
 - Ushers should make masks available to those parishioners who come to Mass without proper masks and wish to use one.
- Cleaning and disinfecting:
 - Thorough and repeated cleaning of high-contact surfaces and objects should be maintained. This includes water fountains, holy water fonts, doorknobs, etc.
 - Prepare and maintain clean bathrooms. Provide adequate soap and water for handwashing.
 - Provide hand sanitizer at all entrances.
- Other Safety Issues:
 - It is recommended that holy Communion be placed only in hand. If it is to be placed on the tongue:
 - Those parishioners wishing to receive Communion on the tongue should go to the end of the Communion line
 - The Host should be given by the priest or deacon only.
 - The priest or deacon must sanitize their hands or fingers between each communicant to avoid contamination.
 - Parish gatherings should operate based on the pastor's discretion – allowing for safe distancing where possible, wearing masks when safe distancing is not possible, and following proper cleaning and sanitizing protocols.

- Parishes should consider livestreaming Mass if possible, posting on the parish website and utilizing social media.
 - Pastors should keep their parishioners engaged using their website to post the weekly bulletin – providing safety guidelines in this time of struggle – direction to attending Mass safely – encourage online giving where established. We cannot support our community without the support of the faithful.
 - All parish offices should follow the guidelines in this document for the workplace and employee safety.
 - All churches should be cleaned and disinfected daily when in use.
 - Understanding that various factors (e.g., building design and configuration, demographics, etc.) make every parish unique. Applying these guidelines to parish programs and gatherings is subject to the pastor's discretion.
- Catholic Schools and Early Learning Centers
 - Visit www.dosaeducation.org for details and updates from the Office of the Superintendent for the Diocese of St. Augustine Catholic Schools and Early Learning Centers.