LAKE COUNTY GENERAL HEALTH DISTRICT ISSUES GUIDANCE FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The Ohio Department of Health and Governor DeWine have classified churches as providing an essential service and have made explicit allowance for their gathering. However, local leaders from the faith-based communities are seeking best practices to ensure the protection of their membership and the communities of Lake County. Lake County General Health District welcomes the opportunity to provide guidance to protect the faith-based community. LCGHD recommends that the following guidance is considered, and is subject to change as the Stay Safe Ohio directives evolve.

Universal essential protective measures for funerals/weddings/church services include:

- Clean and sanitize the facility and all high touch point surfaces such as door handles, restrooms, and water fountains between services.
- Prop doors open if possible to reduce contact with common touch points.
- Ensure a minimum of six-foot distance between families and/or individuals.
- Promote hand washing and provide proper hygiene education/reminders.
- Encourage individuals to conduct a self-assessment of their health each morning (anyone with a 100.4 deg. or higher temperature, or other flu-like symptoms should not attend services).
- Continue to utilize social media to broadcast services to encourage at-risk members to stay at home. This will also encourage those who are afraid to still feel they are participating.
- Provide hand sanitizer or other hand washing supplies.
- Facemasks, face coverings, or face shields should be worn to protect others.
- All physical contact should be avoided (handshakes, hugs, etc.).

Some recommended best practices and modifications include:

- Outdoor services, when Northeast Ohio weather allows, is the preferred way to provide services to help ensure that individuals are maintaining a six-foot distance between families or members. Indoor services are permissible and additional steps should be considered to ensure safe distancing can be achieved.
  - Restrict the number of individuals to 50% of the maximum as determined by the fire code. Groups may want to utilize known pew/chair space and determine how many families and members can safely distance themselves for count at each service.
  - While at a church gathering, families should enter, sit, stand, and exit as a group. No one should wander away from their family group.
  - Provide ushers to help facilitate social distancing for seating.
Dismissal should be controlled and attendees should be instructed to exit row by row to ensure no unnecessary crowding or congregating at the exits. If possible have one way to enter and exit to avoid contact.

- Services may be conducted in parking lots where members are encouraged to remain in their cars. Cars can be spaced out.
- Churches with multiple rooms/wings may consider conducting live or streaming sermons with maintaining groups of ten or less placed in separate rooms throughout the facility.
- Consider additional services to reduce number of people at each service.
- Whenever possible, have ministry groups meet in groups of 10 or less or in spaces that can accommodate sufficient social distancing.
- Consider and utilize alternative methods of administering church offerings, communion, baptisms, and the Lord’s Supper that do not require physical contact. Avoid sharing common cups and other commonly shared items.
- Individuals with chronic disease or age 55 or older should be encouraged to not attend, and join via social media if available.
- Maintain a log of attendees to help facilitate COVID-19 tracing should an individual later be identified as COVID-19 positive and/or having had a known exposure.
- Encourage families and members to avoid parking next to each other in the parking lot and to leave quickly after services to avoid large gatherings to form in the lot.
- Forgo serving foods, coffee stations, and donut fellowships for the time being, as these are places where people will gather.
- Forgo using hymnals, missals, and physical church bulletins to limit hand-to-hand exposure.
- Do not utilize nurseries, Sunday school, children’s church, or bus ministries at this time.

As the Stay Safe Ohio guidance evolves over the next year, LCGHD will still recommend following universal essential protective measures for funerals/weddings/church services stated above. We believe following these measures will ensure groups do the best job possible in keeping families and membership safe and healthy.

The Health District is willing to review any plans developed by churches. Church and faith-based organizational operations are not subject to approval by the Health District. The Health District’s recommendations are intended to guide you in the right direction. The Health District is aware that these times of social distancing have made what communities are used to very difficult and strained. Please be assured that the more everyone participates in efforts to stop the spread of the virus, the healthier we can keep our communities.

Please contact the COVID-19 hotline at (440) 350-2188 for questions or further assistance.

###