



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF WORSHIP

COVID-19: Pastoral Responses to Recent Surge of Cases

Parish Protocols for Contact and Closure

If a pastor, parish administrator, or any other employee of a parish believes they have COVID-19, or that they have had enough exposure to someone who has contracted the virus to pose a threat to their own personal health:

- 1) The priest, deacon, or parish administrator responsible for the parish should contact their county health department to determine proper actions for the individual(s) exposed, including but not limited to: testing, monitoring of symptoms, additional sanitization of the parish campus, any contract tracing, and the possibility of a need to close the parish campus/ facilities. This should be done in compliance with recommendations made by government health officials.
- 2) The priest/ deacon/ parish administrator should also inform the Chancery and the Office of Worship of any anticipated temporary or prolonged closure of the parish, especially in terms of the suspension of public Masses or other celebrations that may mitigate the spread of the exposure.
- 3) If a closure results, parishioners should be encouraged to attend other parishes or any available live-streamed Mass. As a reminder, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains in effect, and individuals should always exercise cautious personal judgment.

How might the State's "Cluster Action Initiative" affect my parish?

The state's recent initiative to mitigate the spread of infection has prompted three categories, each with successively higher restrictions: Yellow Zone (precautionary), Orange (warning), and Red (most restrictive).

Yellow

Worship services remain unaffected; participation can remain at **up to 50% building capacity** for indoor worship services.

Orange

Worship services are restricted to the **LESSER OF 33% capacity or 25 people**. While daily Masses and small weddings/ funerals may be possible with these numbers, weekend Masses may not.

Red

Worship services are restricted to the **LESSER OF 25% capacity or 10 people**. While small weddings/ funerals may be possible with these numbers, most other celebrations may not.

What if there is no apparent/immanent threat in my parish or region?

Since the dispensation to attend weekend Mass remains in place, and even though we would encourage daily Eucharist for those who desire it under normal circumstances, pastors may modify the schedule of Masses, particularly daily Masses, at their discretion.

For instance, if a pastor/ administrator or supply priests are in a vulnerable category or wish to limit their travel and exposure to the virus, a reduction of daily Masses could be one approach within the purview of the parish.

The Office of Worship will field any questions regarding these initiatives, and will provide whatever support possible. Please communicate any possibility of exposure and/or facility closure to the diocese and parishioners in a timely manner.