

Effective May 7, 2023

Summary of the Guidelines:

- Masks are recommended but not required for worship services and other church functions.
 - A section of seats in the Sanctuary will be reserved for people who wish to remain masked and prefer to sit among other people who are also wearing masks.
 - Hosts of on-campus and off-campus events (meetings, Auction events) should make decisions about precautions considering this guidance, local regulations, and the comfort level of each attendee.
- Enjoy worship services virtually and refrain from attending any other in-person church events if:
 - You are not feeling well,
 - Recently tested positive for Covid,
 - Were recently exposed to someone with Covid, or
 - Are awaiting results of a Covid test.
- The Board expects that everyone in the UUCSS community who is medically able to receive COVID-19 vaccinations has received them, and that those planning church-related events will make sure their plans follow this guidance as well as local regulations.
- The Minister, Assistant Minister for Spiritual Growth, Music Director, and Worship Committee will establish protocols, consistent with these guidelines, for the timing and conduct of in-person worship services and religious education classes.
- The Covid Task Force will continue to monitor the situation and make recommendations to the Board as warranted.

Background Information:

As a congregation, we are in covenant with one another to act not just as a collection of individuals, but as a body that works for the good of all. Because our Unitarian Universalist faith is grounded in values that call us to care about one another, we must be aware not only of our individual needs, but those of the most vulnerable among us. We should respect what the others might need even if you don't have the same needs. We encourage congregants to ask each other about what would help make them comfortable and to honor this in deciding our individual behaviors. In revising these guidelines, the Board is striving to balance the health and safety of our congregants with their spiritual and emotional needs for gathering in community.

These UUCSS guidelines are informed by UUA guidance updated January 21, 2022, <https://www.uua.org/leaderlab/january-2022-letter>, and by the most recent public health guidance from the CDC and local counties as well as scientific information.

Public health and community risk information:

- COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) will end at the end of the day on May 11, 2023 (<https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-public-health-emergency/index.html>).

- Community risk levels in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties have been consistently “low” (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>).
- The CDC recommends advises masking for Medium and High community risk environments (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fscience%2Fcommunity-levels.html).
- Montgomery County states that face coverings are recommended “Indoors and in crowded areas, regardless of vaccination status” (<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/face-coverings.html>).
- Prince George’s County states that face masks are recommended “indoors and in crowded areas” (<https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/4465/Face-Masks>).
- FDA authorization for Covid vaccines was updated on April 18, 2023, to allow people age 65 years or older and many people who are immunocompromised to receive another dose of bivalent vaccines (<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-changes-simplify-use-bivalent-mrna-covid-19-vaccines>).

The contextual information, our congregation, is important to consider. As our recent survey shows, UUCSS is an older population. Some members are immunocompromised, or care for people who are immunocompromised. It is likely that a high percent of members are up-to-date on Covid vaccinations.

- Using national data, the CDC publishes risk of hospitalization and death from Covid, which increases with age (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-age.html>).
- A recent publication compared risk of death among VA patients hospitalized for Covid versus seasonal influenza (2022-2023). While the death rate was higher among Covid patients (6%) than influenza patients (3.75%) overall, the difference in death rates was much less than earlier in the pandemic. The death rate from Covid was lower in this study than early in the pandemic (2020), while death rates from influenza were about the same. The death rate from Covid was highest among those who were unvaccinated, and those older than 65 years (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2803749#:~:text=The%20death%20rate%20at%2030,Ci%2C%201.29%2D2.02%5D>).