



Date: August 19, 2021

REVISION TO DIOCESE OF JOLIET COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

This document shall supersede all previously issued guidelines and are subject to revision. Parishes shall defer to local regulations if they are more stringent.

From the start of the pandemic our overall guiding thought has been to protect the health of others, not to respond to criticism or take the easy path.

As noted on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus has provided a renewed upswing in the number of cases¹.

- It is more than two times as contagious as previous variants.
- Some data suggest the Delta variant might cause more severe illness than previous strains in unvaccinated persons.
- Unvaccinated people remain the greatest concern.
- Breakthrough infections occur much less often than infections in unvaccinated people. However, individuals infected with the Delta variant, including fully vaccinated people with symptomatic breakthrough infections, can transmit it to others.
- Fully vaccinated people with asymptomatic breakthrough infections can transmit it to others; however, the greatest risk of transmission is among unvaccinated people, who are much more likely to contract and therefore transmit the virus.
- Fully vaccinated people with Delta variant breakthrough infections appear to be infectious for a shorter period.

In response to these facts and to local regulations we are updating the Diocese of Joliet guidelines.

PARISH ACTIVITIES

- **If people do not feel well, they SHOULD NOT ATTEND services, gatherings, or come to work.**
- Masks are recommended for indoor events.
- We will not ask the general populace or staff about vaccinations.
- Pastors shall decide COVID-19 protocols for parish offices and meetings.
- Air flow and ventilation are still KEY elements to preventing the spread of viruses, so parishes need to maintain air systems and regularly change filters. Consideration should be given to air systems that kill viruses in the air with either ion generators or ultraviolet light.
- **No potlucks or family style food.**

Procedures for liturgical services:

1. Dispensation from the requirement to attend Mass in person is still in place.

2. Masks are strongly recommended for everyone, vaccinated or not.
3. Sanitization is still required, but once a day is adequate per the CDC.
4. Handwashing is still required, especially before eating or touching the face.
5. Continue to provide seating areas that accommodate the different sensitivities of parishioners.
 - a. Some may still not feel safe unless there is the 6-foot separation.
 - b. Others may feel confident enough to sit at arm's length from others outside their households.
6. Vaccinations are strongly encouraged for all ministers, especially those who will be at the altar.
7. Holy water fonts are still to be left empty. Baptismal fonts with filtration systems that are treated with chlorine may be filled. (Between 1mg and 3mg of chlorine per .26 gallons of water.²)
8. Hand sanitizer should be available when entering/exiting the church and/or at the reception of Communion.
9. No chalice at Communion.
10. No physical sign of peace.
11. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required to wear masks while giving Communion. (Communicant to step to side to consume host).
12. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion's hands must be sanitized before distributing Communion.
13. Priests, deacons, and servers may process.
14. Bridal processions are allowed.
15. Collection baskets on a pole are allowed but not passing of the collection baskets.
16. **Choirs are not allowed.**
17. **Congregational singing is not allowed.**
 - a. Remove hymnal if they have been set out.
 - b. Liturgy guides may remain in pews.
 - c. If there is a cantor, in order to limit singing, he/she must select songs or verses that people are unlikely to know without music.
 - d. Mass parts are to be spoken wherever possible. Do not ask or invite by raising the hand that people are to participate.
 - e. Missalettes can be in pews and bulletins may be distributed.
18. **Total of four (4) musicians are allowed** of which two (2) may be cantors. (Cantors count as musicians.)
 - f. Cantors must be 12 feet apart if unmasked.
 - g. Other musicians must be 6 feet apart.
 - h. No wind or brass instruments allowed.
19. Communion on the hand is still the preferable option. Communion on the tongue is allowed at the pastor's discretion. When given it is only to be dispensed after those receiving in the hand and following the protocols for sanitizing hands between communicants.
20. Registration is not required. Pastors may want to retain their registration systems in case of a spike in COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant.
21. **A pastor may choose to take more restrictive measures than those listed here, but he may not take less restrictive measures.**

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES (INCLUDES BOTH SCHOOLS & RELIGIOUS EDUCATION) Must comply with state requirements:

The safety and wellbeing of students, families, and education employees remain our top priorities.

- The progress of the COVID-19 pandemic in Illinois remains unpredictable. We continue to consult with public health, education and civil authorities and modify requirements during the year as conditions,

mandates, and guidance change. We are committed to providing an integrated and balanced perspective.

- Faithful citizenship is key. We expect our families to take personal responsibility for the common good and their own safety. Taking every precaution to reduce the spread of the virus is an act of charity toward our sisters and brothers in Christ, particularly those too young to receive vaccine protection.

Masking

Given the new evidence on the COVID-19 Delta variant and the rising infection and hospitalization rates, the state of Illinois has mandated the wearing of masks indoors for all education personnel and Pre-K through grade 12 students regardless of vaccination status. This guidance is consistent with that of the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics⁴. Both have updated their guidance to recommend universal indoor masking in all buildings for people over the age of 2 regardless of vaccination status. While we recognize that the preference of some of our staff and families is for masks to be optional for vaccinated individuals, we will follow mandates and guidance in force.

In keeping with state of Illinois mandates and with the recommendations of public health authorities, we will start the school year requiring masks for all individuals while inside education buildings, regardless of vaccination status.

- As conditions improve across our regions and the mandates and guidance of civil authorities and public health agencies allow, we will regularly evaluate whether to continue to require masks for all individuals in our schools and programs.
- It is also important to note that masking at the start of the school year while removing other mitigations is an important safeguard for high-risk students, faculty, and staff – further protecting those who performed so heroically this past school year.

Please note the following guidance on masking requirements for educational programs:

- Exposed students and staff who are masked and three feet from a confirmed case indoors are not considered close contacts in the new CDC guidance. Therefore, consistent, and correct mask use will drastically reduce the number of students and staff needing to quarantine.
- No masks are required outdoors, regardless of vaccination status.

Returning to near pre-pandemic full operation

Return to near-pre-pandemic full operations with adherence to guidance outlined in the rest of this framework:

- Classroom seating consistent in case tracking is required, maintain seating charts.
- School Masses, assemblies, fundraisers, etc.
- Lunch schedule and service.
- Restrooms.
- Library, science, and computer labs.
- Lockers.
- Traffic flow through school corridors.
- Sharing of materials (e.g., crayons, markers, math manipulatives, etc.).
- Parent–Teacher conferences.
- School and religious education volunteers are permitted, regardless of their individual vaccination status; volunteers must follow mask guidelines.

- All co-curricular activities, sacramental, rehearsals, athletics, music, clubs, field trips, VBS, etc. are permitted.
- Before- and after-care programs (these and all other programs will follow all prescribed guidance outlined in this framework).
- No pandemic-related arrival and departure procedures (wellness checks, procedure, staggered drop-off/pick-up schedules, or dedicated entrance/exit doors) are not currently required.

Vaccinations

All eligible students, teachers and staff are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as an act of charity.

- Fully vaccinated individuals who have
 - Been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and are asymptomatic are not required to quarantine.
 - Proof of vaccination will be required to avoid quarantines.
- Fully vaccinated people are required to isolate if they test positive.

Physical Distancing and Classroom Seating

It is important to maintain three feet of physical distancing wherever possible (classrooms, assemblies, Mass, etc.). Specifically:

- Classrooms:
 - Arrangement of desks should allow for three feet physical distancing from center point of chair to center point of chair (mouth to mouth); however, distancing and furniture placement should not inhibit best academic practices.
 - If you have a child with special (immune compromised) needs provide special seating and extra sanitization as required.
 - Group tables and other furniture arrangements can be used; it is **highly recommended that students all face the same direction.**
 - Use of rugs and area carpets is permissible.
 - Seating charts should be maintained in all classrooms in the event they are needed for contact tracing purposes.
- Lunch period:
 - When eating inside, schools or religious education programs should strive to achieve as much physical distancing between students as possible, although students no longer need to face in the same direction. When space and weather permits, have the students eat outside to reduce the risk of transmission.
 - Use staggered lunch schedules, when possible, to allow for greater physical distancing.

Hygiene

Good respiratory and hand hygiene must be practiced by all individuals. To help everyone comply:

- Hand sanitizer should be readily available in all classrooms, offices and common areas and regular use should be strongly encouraged.
- Staff and students should use hand sanitizer every time they enter a room.
- All students and staff should be regularly encouraged to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene (covering coughs and sneezes, frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer).
- Water bottles should be used instead of drinking directly from water fountains.

Ventilation

Improvements made to ventilation systems will help reduce COVID-19 and other disease transmission. When safe/practical to do so:

- Weather permitting open windows and doors to promote cross ventilation.
- Place fans as close as possible to open windows or doors (blowing out) to promote ventilation.
- Use portable air purifiers whenever opening windows is not feasible and/or there is not a filtered, forced air HVAC system.

Daily Cleaning

Proper cleaning and disinfection, including wiping down desks and high traffic areas at least once a day will help reduce the presence and spread of any germs. Special care and treatment are required for anyone with compromised immune systems or health needs.

Outdoor Instruction / Activities

The risk of transmission is considerably lower outdoors than indoors. Whenever possible, consider using outdoor spaces for classes, lunch, snacks, or other activities.

Safety Protocol Signage

Other than mask reminders, no safety/protocol posters or decals will be distributed this school year.

- 2020/21 posters should be removed if they are no longer relevant.
- Floor decals can remain as physical distancing is always a good idea.
- Directional arrows denoting one-way traffic can be removed.

ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE PROCEDURES FOR ALL CHURCH AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

All individuals must remain at home when sick or experiencing any symptoms to minimize the chance of spreading COVID-19 or other germs and viruses. Specific to COVID-19 quarantines:

Symptomatic or COVID-19 Positive Individuals

- All symptomatic individuals must remain home, regardless of vaccination status. Families are obligated to report COVID-19 diagnoses, or close contact cases, to their school/religious education office.
- If symptoms last longer than 24 hours, an individual must receive a negative COVID-19 test or alternative medical diagnosis prior to returning to class.
- Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days from the date symptoms first appeared or the date of a positive test result.

Quarantine Procedures for Close Contacts

- Vaccinated students/faculty/staff do not need to quarantine if they are asymptomatic, but they must wear a mask indoors in public spaces for 10 days following exposure, or until test result is negative 5 days after exposure.
- Faculty, staff, or other adults who are masked and maintain six (6) feet of physical distancing from the positive individual do not need to quarantine.
- *In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student who are masked and maintaining three feet of physical distancing from the positive individual. These students do not need to quarantine. (Per CDC)*

- The student exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting
- Unvaccinated students/faculty/staff who are close contacts to positive household members, including siblings, must quarantine for 10 days.
- There is no longer a need for the Catholic grade school to notify the high school of a sibling of a confirmed positive case – this will be the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian.

Quarantine guidelines continue to be fluid and we expect to issue updated guidance as required.

All close contacts of presumed COVID-positive persons and those cases confirmed COVID-19 positive MUST be reported by the school to the Catholic Schools Office via email to gkuban@dioceseofjoliet.org. The school then must report those cases to the Diocesan Human Resources Office. Religious education programs should report close contacts and confirmed positive COVID-19 cases directly to the Diocesan Human Resources Office.

TRAVEL

- Domestic Travel
 - Fully vaccinated students/teachers/staff do not need post-travel COVID-19 testing or self-quarantines if they are not symptomatic and provide proof of vaccination.
 - Unvaccinated students/teachers/staff must follow the prevailing post-travel quarantine recommendations when traveling to Orange States. This currently means a 10-day quarantine OR proof of a negative test no earlier than 72 hours prior to returning to Chicago (or anytime post return, though an individual must quarantine until a negative test result is received). A negative test = no quarantine required.
- International Travel
 - The CDC currently requires a negative COVID-19 test or proof of recovery to board a plane to the United States. Because of this negative test, there is no required quarantine upon arrival, regardless of vaccination status.

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1. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html>
 2. <https://www.cdc.gov/safewater/effectiveness-on-pathogens.html#table2>
 3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>