



**CIOGC's COVID-19 Joint Task Force**  
**Statement of Reopening of Mosques for Prayer**  
**Executive Summary**

The State of Illinois issued guidelines for reopening in the form of Restore Illinois public health plan. It consists of five phases based on the health metrics that indicate it is safe to move forward, health metrics may also tell us to return to a prior phase. Mosques were eager for reopening and resumption of services. The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago's (CIOGC) COVID-19 Joint Task Force, a task force of over 100 individuals and organizations leading the Muslim communities' COVID-19 response, has invited the Presidents of Islamic organizations, Imams, health professionals, and representatives of facilities management to meet on May 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss applicable guidelines for mosques. Several additional meetings were held to further update the initial plan. The overarching goal of these discussions and the current recommendations is to provide guidance on how our mosques can gradually reopen in a safe, organized, and responsible manner while adhering to local and national guidelines. Our top priorities are to protect our communities and ensure that our mosques do not become hot spots for the spread of Covid-19. The following guidelines and recommendations reflect the current recommendations from the State as well as the consensus of our mosques' leadership and health experts on the CIOGC's Covid-19 Joint Task Force.

In line with the recommendations of the State, we do not encourage mosques to resume prayers at the mosques, especially for those who are vulnerable to Covid-19 including older adults and those with co-morbidities. We want to reiterate that large gatherings still increase the risk of spreading and contracting Covid-19 and that the safest course of action is to continue to hold prayers for 10 people or less, preferably outdoors.

Although the current Statewide guidelines continue to recommend gatherings of no more than 10 people, mosques that cannot follow the 10-person limit, may gradually open while limiting attendance to a maximum of 100 attendees or 25% of building capacity, whichever is lower, if mosques can ensure their readiness using the following essential guidelines and readiness assessment steps.

1. Conduct a risk assessment thoroughly of your facility with your leadership and key personnel involved to make sure that your mosque is ready to open. Use the following tool: [Risk Assessment Tool](#). Keep the following in mind:
  - a. Assess the risk for your building by thinking through every part of facility
  - b. Think of the way a person enters your masjid/organization.
  - c. Think of whether something is high, medium, or low risk in terms of transmission of the virus.
  - d. Managing and reducing your risk is unique to each masjid/organization
  - e. DON'T RUSH TO OPEN WITHOUT A PLAN and without assessing your risk and coming up with actions to lower that risk.
2. Ensure a physical distance of at least 6 ft or 2 meters between staff, congregants, and visitors at all times including during entry, exit, and at the mosque. Click here for Samples you can print: [Sample Posters to Display](#). The taskforce is procuring more templates that can be print ready and should have soon. This step requires:
  - a. A process to keep track of how many people are the mosque at any given time
  - b. Marked paths for entry, exit, and movement at the mosque
  - c. Marked prayer spots inside and outside the mosque, for those who pray outside
  - d. Marked no entry/exit areas
  - e. Ability to enforce physical distance guidelines
  - f. Marked parking spots and areas not to be used.

3. Ensure that staff, congregants, and visitors wear face coverings at all times. This requires:
  - a. Education for congregants before arrival to the mosque
  - b. Ability to provide face coverings for those who come without a face covering
  - c. Protocols and security to handle congregants refusing to wear a face cover. It is important to have the right people handling these discussions to maintain respect for congregants too.
4. Screen staff, congregants, and visitors for symptoms (and/or for temperature) upon arrival. This process needs to be conducted by a trained person who understands the need for privacy and respect of people otherwise this become too aggressive. If screening is logistically not feasible, congregants should be instructed not to enter the mosque if they have symptoms, tested positive, or have been exposed to people who have tested positive.
5. Post signs throughout the facility to educate congregants/visitors about safety measures and remind them to adhere to hygienic and physical distancing guidelines. Click here for samples; [Safety Measures Posters](#) and [Sample Posters to Display](#).
6. Post signs at entrances and using other communication forms (newsletter, website, social media, phone calls, text messages, etc) asking the following
  - a. People to bring their prayer rugs and make Wudu before arrival to the mosque
  - b. Asking those who are sick, vulnerable to stay home and not to ENTER the mosque.
  - c. Have every person attest they don't have any symptoms or not been exposed to a covid-19 patient by having a poster specific for this. Click here to access a sample: [Symptom Free Attestation Poster](#)
7. Have a Covid-19 officer/lead committee to coordinate and lead all Covid-19 efforts
  - a. This lead should attend ongoing meetings that CIOGC will hold that mosques can benefit and learn from each other.
8. Have trained volunteers to organize and monitor people's movements starting from the parking lot until they exit the facility.
9. Have a system to identify who visits the mosque at any given time to aid in contact tracing.
10. Have protocols to facilitate contact tracing in case some staff, congregants, and visitors test positive. Click here for step by step instructions on what to do: [Confirmed Positive Case Guidance](#)
11. Ability to clean/disinfect regularly and frequently with protocols. See below guidelines for more details. Click here for details also: [Disinfecting Tips](#)

More detailed guidelines are listed out in the CIOGC's Covid-19 Joint Task Force plan. Please prepare the respective communities by continuous communicating and educating frequently on safety requirements for their own health and the health and safety of others. Although these guidelines are meant to provide guidance on reopening, it should be noted here that our Imams and Scholars continue to remind us that it is still permissible to pray at home and in fact praying at home might be the more acceptable option for those who might harm themselves and/or others by praying at the mosque.

## **Preamble**

The current COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted practices of worship and gatherings for faith traditions across the world. In Islam, mosques play an essential role in the lives of Muslims. In addition to the religious and spiritual services, mosques provide a wide array of health, social, civic engagement, educational, youth development, and self-improvement programs for people across the lifespan. These services and programs are essential for the wellbeing of community members of the mosque.

Mosques play a critical role in our society, and Muslim organizations are eager to reopen and resume their worship services and programs. As public health officials have begun to relax restrictions on the size of public gatherings, Muslims, like other faith groups, are grappling with questions of when and how to reopen their physical space to its members.

CIOGC's invited health professionals, presidents of Islamic Organizations, and Imams to discuss how our mosques can gradually reopen in a safe, sensitive, organized, and responsible manner while adhering to local and national guidelines. These meetings and conversations have resulted in the following guidelines and recommendations.

## **General Guidance**

To prevent the spread of the virus, all mosques and organizations should continue to disseminate information about practices aimed at preventing the spread of the virus as recommended by the CDC guidelines including:

- Community members must maintain proper social distancing of 6 feet from other people
  - Avoid close contact with those who are sick
- Proper handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds should be emphasized
  - Particularly for those who were coughing, sneezing, blowing their nose, or for those who have been out in a public setting.
- Everyone over the age of 2 should wear a mask or cloth face covering that will cover their mouth and nose when outside.
  - Coughs and sneezes should be covered with a tissue or inside a person's elbow if they are not wearing a face mask/cloth face covering and should be followed with handwashing immediately.
- Community members who are sick, especially those with respiratory illnesses should stay at home.
- Children who can't be restrained and vulnerable community members (the elderly, those with chronic conditions, immunosuppressed, etc.) should be asked to pray at home.
- High touch areas should be disinfected and cleaned on a daily basis and cleaned with soap or detergent if they are visibly dirty.

## **Preparation for Reopening**

Despite what phase we currently are in, reopening will take place gradually and follow the data-drive guidelines issued by health authorities. Mosques vary in size and in the number of people who attend congregational prayers. The decision to reopen depends on whether your mosque is ready for reopening. The following are a set of recommendations mosques can consider as we get ready for reopening.

## **Reopening Guidelines**

### **1. Staff and Volunteers**

- Form committees to develop guidelines, prepare educational materials, and coordinate/organize efforts related to COVID-19
- Ensure that teams of volunteers and security are ready and trained to use personal protective equipment (PPE) and organize the flow of traffic (entry/exit and movement inside the facility)
- Ensure that your staff and volunteers have the necessary PPE and supplies.
- Instruct staff and volunteers to protect themselves and practice everyday preventive actions, wear masks, and avoid handshaking/hugging of visitors at all times.
- Instruct sick employees to stay home.

### **2. Infrastructure & Contingency Planning**

- Depending on the size of your Mosque and congregation, develop plans for shorter and more frequent prayers with the ability to know who visits your facility at any given time. Plans should be

implemented gradually starting with daily prayers and finally with Friday prayers.

- Review your facility and develop plans for:
  - Controlled entry/exit and waiting while maintaining a social distance of 6 ft or 2 meters
  - Separate entrance/s from exit/s and one-way movement.
  - Space for screening stations for volunteers at entry/exits.
  - System to track the number of people at the facility at any given time and their contact information if possible.
  - Controlled entry and exit of the Wudu area to limit the number of people.
    - Wudu and bathroom area should be for emergencies only
    - Should be staffed for cleaning as needed
  - Prayer area
    - Tape the floor for distancing
    - Shorter/frequent prayers i.e. batching of prayer services
  - Staffing to monitor the flow of traffic and enforcement of distancing
  - Plan ahead with traffic flow cones.
  - Systems to know who visits your facility at any given time to facilitate contact tracing.
  - Consider limiting entrance into parking lots and/or designated spots for different batched prayer times.
- Designate space to separate people who are sick upon arrival or those who become sick at the mosque.
- Ensure proper filters on the HVAC system.
- Provide fresh air circulation by opening windows/doors if weather permits.
- Consider hosting prayers in open areas around the mosque if the weather permits.
- Put away common-use items including Qurans, hijabs, etc.
- No flyers/handouts/distribution and sale of food/goods.
- Screen staff, congregants, and visitors as stated by local, state, and national guidelines.
- Continue Quran and Sunday school classes online until schools are allowed to re-open.
- Visitors should be monitored
  - Every visitor (who is not just a patron) will be required to complete a visitor form.
  - Utilize the visitor form template: [Visitor Form](#)
  - Types of visitors : contractors, repair workers, vending machine fulfillment, external cleaning staff, etc.
  - Try to restrict visitors as much as possible.

### **Elevators & Staircases**

- Discourage the use of elevators for those who can take the stairs.
- Limit number of people who can share the elevator

### **3. Communications**

- Develop communication materials for the community. Click here: [Best Practice Communication Tips](#)
  - Newsletters
  - Website
  - Robocalls
  - On-site banners/posters
- Collect contact information from worshippers.
- Ensure that a communication plan is in place to share with the community in a timely manner
- Share credible information about COVID-19 using language/s appropriate for the people your organization serves on various platforms.
- Develop and place posters and signage with simple information and instructions in multiple languages at entrances/exits, and throughout the mosque.
- Communicate clearly with members in advance about new expectations for mosque entry including:
  - COVID-19 screening at entrances
  - Extended entry time to account for screening and social distancing
  - Prayer arrangements and schedule with signup procedures

- Praying while maintaining a distance
- Bring their own rugs and cloth face covering
- Place large signs with instructions asking people who are older, have underlying conditions, and/or sick to pray at home and that they are placing themselves and others at risk by visiting the mosque
- If there is a waiting period to enter the mosque, have them wait in their car
- State with clarity that with screening, people not abiding by the guidelines may be denied entry
  - Have a backup security plan in place

#### 4. Education

- Ask people who are sick, especially those with respiratory illnesses, to stay home.
- Instruct children who can't be restrained and vulnerable people to pray at home
- Follow state and local guidance as well as complimentary CDC guidance particularly with respect to face coverings.
- Post posters to remind people of preventive measures and guidelines.
- Bathrooms should be avoided, unless absolutely needed. Place posters inside to remind people of proper handwashing procedures.
- Instruct community members to make Wudu at home.
- Ask people to take shoes with them in a plastic bag so they do not crowd the shoe rack area.
- Ask people to bring their own rugs.
- Emphasize the message that the virus does not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or backgrounds.
- Instruct worshippers to wear masks/cloth face coverings throughout the entire time inside, even during prayer.
- This can prevent transmission by asymptomatic individuals.
- Refer to the general guidance section on how to protect yourself from catching the virus.

#### 5. Training

- Offer training to your staff and volunteers on:
  - Proper use and disposal of PPE.
  - How to organize flow of people in/out and inside the organization.
  - How to screen people and monitor visitors as they enter for fever and respiratory symptoms.
  - Restrict visitors and staff with fever and symptoms.
  - Protocol for handling potential cases or people who show symptoms at the entrance or at the mosque.
  - Conflict resolution and how to deal with people who challenge the rules and those who are visibly sick or become sick at the organization.
  - Have staff refer to section 2 for infrastructure and contingency planning training.
  - **Screeners:** Volunteers at the doors must proper PPE.
    - Link to details regarding PPE and safe removal of PPE  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf>
- **Training to janitorial staff:**
  - Cleaning with proper and healthy use of approved chemicals while protecting themselves.
  - Use disinfectant products that have been pre-approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use against emerging viral pathogens.
  - Disinfectants should be applied during routine cleaning of all facility spaces.
  - Routine and frequent cleaning of frequently touched surfaces/objects (e.g., doorknobs/handles, toilet flush handles, water faucet handles, seating, and flooring and stair handrails to be cleaned with disinfectants.
- Disinfecting Products
  - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Disinfecting Guidance
  - [CDC:https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html)

- [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening\\_America\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf)
- EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/six-steps-safe-effective-disinfectant-use>
- Open Free Online Training Here:
  - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/training/online-training>
  - <https://www.cloroxpro.com/educational-courses/>

## 6. Supplies and Resources

- Cones and signage to control the flow of people
- PPE - Masks, Gloves, Disinfectants, cleaning supplies, soap, tissues, and alcohol-based hand rubs.
  - No-touch Hand rub stations at multiple locations.
- Plastic bags for shoes.
- Extra rugs, thick paper towels, or disposal paper to pray.
- Posters and banners.
- Screening forms/contact information forms/cards if adopted by facility
- Touchless thermometers for temperature checks

In conclusion, the overarching goal of these guidelines is to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. Anytime a mosque cannot implement the proposed guidelines, it would be safer to keep the facility closed until the mosque is ready. For the time being, we will continue to monitor how things evolve and issue updated guidance as needed.

### Additional Resources

#### General Guidance for Faith Communities

- [https://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/20200319\\_Faith\\_Based\\_Guidance\\_Final.pdf](https://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/20200319_Faith_Based_Guidance_Final.pdf)  
Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>