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Places of Worship May Reopen in Stanislaus County Following Statewide Guidance

Stanislaus County - Following California Department of Public Health's announcement, Stanislaus County Public Health encourages places of worship in Stanislaus County to open as soon as they have implemented the State recommendations found at covid19.ca.gov. Places of worship may open at 25% of building capacity or with attendance limited to 100 people, whichever is lower. An assessment will be made by local and state public health officials within three weeks and guidance may be adjusted.

"Places of worship provide comfort to many in our community, and we appreciate the collaborative work with our faith leaders on important re-opening practices," said Dr. Julie Vaishampayan, Stanislaus County Public Health Officer. "There have been many outbreaks linked to religious services and choir practices. We have faith that our community will continue to look out for each other by observing six feet of social distancing and by limiting activities that promote spread such as singing, especially during this time when members of our community need a safe space to help them cope."

The new guidelines include:

- Recommending staff, volunteers, and congregants wear a face covering
- Strongly consider discontinuing singing and group recitation
- Screening congregants and staff for temperature and other symptoms
- Offering plates (and similar items) should not be passed around between worshipers
- Discouraging sharing of items like prayer books, cushions, and prayer rugs
- Frequently disinfecting high traffic areas, such as pews and lobbies
- Disinfecting microphones, instruments, and other items on pulpit and podiums between use
- Rearranging seating and podium areas to allow for six feet of space between people

Additional strong recommendations are to:

1. Maintain a list of congregants in attendance each week. If transmission of COVID-19 is detected, this is critical to help quickly identify those who may have been exposed and stop additional spread
2. Assign a person to educate all on the best social distancing measures and monitor implementation of recommendations

Places of worship are encouraged to continue offering remote and online services, especially for those who are vulnerable to COVID-19 including older adults, at-risk individuals, or those who maybe be sick. The complete statewide guidance intended to keep employees, volunteers, and congregants safe is available at <https://covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>.

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