

## **So what can I do with vaccinations...?!?** **(and other “why can’t we just throw open the sanctuary” questions)**

- A vaccination is not a magic cape
  - Even 95% efficacy means that statistically 19 out of 20 people are effectively covered by the vaccine but 1 in 20 is not
  - Vaccines are less effective against variants
  - Being vaccinated means it’s unlikely YOU will become seriously ill, but there is still a chance you can catch a variant and/or be infectious (be a virus carrier)
- CDC recommends that masks and distancing remain in effect until the average number of new cases in the US drops below 10,000/day – the last time that happened was March 2020. We are currently at 70,000 new cases per day.
- Herd immunity is defined as 70-90% of the entire population vaccinated (not just your congregation)
  - 20% of the population is below 18 and therefore not eligible for vaccination yet (current vaccines are for 16 and above)
  - Statistically that means even if all who are eligible are vaccinated, >25% is not covered until vaccines are approved for 4 and above
  - Herd immunity won’t really come until 2022
- Latest CDC recommendations for vaccinated individuals:
  - Individuals who are fully vaccinated (at least two weeks past last shot) may safely gather unmasked **but only with family and small groups who are in low risk categories**
  - Fully vaccinated people must still wear masks, socially distance and avoid larger gatherings in a public setting

## **So what does this mean for my opening the sanctuary?**

Basically, the same restrictions should be in place. **Vaccinations do not allow you to throw risk-limiting behavior out the window, even if everyone is vaccinated – not yet.**

- Session is responsible for the use and conditions of use for the building, and for decisions around that.
  - Because of that Session is also then responsible to monitor and enforce any conditions of use of the building you establish. This is NOT the responsibility of the pastor.
  - Whatever conditions of use you establish must be enforced both for the congregation, committees, and outside groups.

- Create a decision tree that takes into consideration the COVID status, vulnerable populations, the building itself, and vulnerability (if any) of your pastor, as well as the ability of the church to conduct virtual worship.
- Pick a CREDIBLE data source on which to base decisions (hint – Facebook isn’t it).
  - In Ohio, use the Ohio government color-coded system – it’s made up of 7 medically-relevant and medical system utilization data points that are objective and unbiased. Presbytery STRONGLY urges churches to meet virtually if your county is red or purple.
  - In other states, use the system at [www.covidactnow.org](http://www.covidactnow.org) - it’s made up of 5 medically-relevant and medical system utilization data points that are objective and unbiased. Presbytery STRONGLY urges churches to meet virtually if your county is orange or red.
  - CDC also has a county-by-county search tool and is very credible, objective and unbiased.
  - Pick ONE data source and stick to that – you will drive yourself crazy if you try to reconcile data from multiple sources, as reports are compiled at different times.
- Presbytery STRONGLY urges churches to stay virtual right now or consider outdoor worship as the weather gets nicer
- Presbytery STRONGLY urges churches that elect to go back to in-person worship to do the following:
  - Masks are mandatory and to be worn at all times.
  - Session members should plan to either provide masks for people who have signed up in advance (see below) and don’t have one, or turn them away
  - Singing only if masked. Better to not sing at all; there are ways to have hymns played on the piano (maybe words on a screen if you have one).
  - Nothing that blows air around during worship – if your air conditioning or heater blows air over the congregation, pre-AC or -heat the room, turn the blower off during the service (encourage coats and sweaters if you must). Open windows and door to provide fresh air ventilation is great!
    - Special filters, foggers, UV etc., only cleans the air until that air blows over someone who is infected – then the air is dirty and infectious – and remember, 40% never show symptoms but are still infectious, and a person who will go on to develop symptoms can be infectious and asymptomatic for up to 8 days
  - More than 6 feet physical distancing between family groups – estimate in advance how many people your sanctuary can realistically hold with at least 6 feet distance
  - Limit anything that is passed around or touched by multiple people.
    - Leave collection plates in the back for people to put offerings in
    - Leave communion elements in the back for them to pick up in advance or have them bring their own
  - Have a sign up sheet before the service so you can estimate how many people want to come (and cut off the sign up when you’ve reached your calculated maximum).

- If people try to come in who have not signed up in advance, Session members need to be at the door to tell them no
- Sign up sheets are also useful in case you need to do contact tracing should there be an exposure
  - If there is an exposure, contact the local Board of Health immediately and shut the building and in-person meeting down for 2 weeks
- Exclude use of bathrooms or any other part of the building (or limit bathrooms to one person at a time and provide alcohol wipes for them to clean surfaces they've touched)

***Stay safe – we're not through this yet!***