



Gulf Atlantic Diocese

of the Anglican Church in North America

COVID Protocols Revisited: Guidelines and Rules

5/19/2021

Dear clergy and wardens of the diocese,

Due to the recent CDC update, I need to share with you the newest guidelines and rules for our ministry in the diocese during the declining but continuing COVID-19 pandemic:

Guidelines to be considered:

1. **Please keep the pandemic in the prayer**, public and private. We should rejoice at the effectiveness and availability of the vaccines. We should rejoice that the pandemic in our country is finally beginning to wane. But at the same time, it is far from over worldwide. And as of this writing on May 19, all of the states of the diocese are still at high or medium risk. We sadly have a ways to go.
2. The new CDC guidelines make it clear that **masks can now be optional for those fully vaccinated.***
3. **Fully vaccinated* clergy may lead worship without wearing masks.**
4. There is no easy way to check on people's vaccination status, so an honor system is the only alternative. People are now expected to **assume personal responsibility for their own health and the health of others** But please remind people that our never ending mandate is to love our neighbors and not just please ourselves.
5. Congregations are encouraged to **create safe places onsite if possible** for those still wishing to practice social distance and worship only with those wearing masks. Providing streaming or previously recorded worship experiences online is likewise recommended.

Rules to be followed:

1. **Unvaccinated individuals* shall be requested (but not required) to continue to wear masks** for their own sake and for the sake of those who cannot be vaccinated, especially younger children. This request shall be clearly conveyed through the use of signs and in other ways as the rector and vestry consider best including: emails, the church website, and announcements. It is also recommended that adequate notice of any COVID protocol changes be given.
2. **Acceptable Ways to Distribute Communion:** 1. Intinction by the priest, 2. Use of pre-consecrated elements, and 3. Communion in one kind using bread. If you wish to use a common cup with members drinking or intincting, you must also provide one of these three acceptable methods. This is primarily for pastoral reasons at the moment because we are not aware of any medical research

concerning the transmissibility of COVID by common cup. The decision to resume communion at the rail is left to each congregation's leadership.

3. Clergy continue to have a pastoral responsibility not to be a potential source of infection. Therefore **unvaccinated clergy shall continue to wear masks when in close proximity to others** or when celebrating the Eucharist unless they have permission from the bishop not to do so.** (This rule may be adapted to any other staff or volunteers as parish leadership deems appropriate.)
4. Any **local government mandates should be followed** if they still require masks in public settings. This is in the new CDC guidelines. (We are not aware of any such current local mandates in our diocese.)

Please be in touch with me if you have any questions or concerns. Our goal is to shift more responsibility to individuals as the CDC has just done, while recognizing that we are by no means at the end of the pandemic yet.

This has been a very difficult season of continually re-adjusting our practices as carefully and prayerfully as we can. Be assured of my prayers.

In Jesus the Messiah,

+ *Neil Lebhar*

The Rt. Rev. Neil G. Lebhar
Bishop of the Gulf Atlantic Diocese

Here are the latest links from the CDC that undergird the guidelines and rules above. **Please read them carefully.** News headlines obviously do not provide an adequate understanding of the necessary CDC information.

For the Fully Vaccinated

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

Choosing Safer Activities

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/pdfs/choosingSaferAct.pdf>

**In general, people are considered fully vaccinated:

- 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine
- If you don't meet these requirements, regardless of your age, you are NOT fully vaccinated. Keep taking all precautions until you are fully vaccinated" (www.cdc.gov).

Masks can also be optional for those who have recovered from COVID for up to three months. After this, they should either get vaccinated or return to wearing a mask.

**The normal basis for such permission would be their doctor's recommendation against vaccination due to a medical condition. But there may be other considerations, and the bishop should be consulted in any case where unvaccinated clergy wish to remove their masks. This rule remains in effect for clergy until their local area is listed at the Low Risk Level according to <https://covidactnow.org/>