

Religious Education and Youth Ministry

2022-23 Operating Framework RE/YM

As we enter our third pastoral year after the onset of COVID, we continue the transition towards living with COVID. Testing, vaccinations, natural immunity and the evolution of the virus afford parishes the ability to assume a more normalized approach and remove many of the precautions required over the last two years. This approach allows parish catechetical leaders to focus nearly 100% of their time on the faith formation and emotional growth of our children and youth.

While protocols such as contact tracing have been lifted for the 2022-23 year, the most effective precaution remains – any individual with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and positive individuals must isolate for a minimum of five days. Continuing to be diligent in ensuring known sick individuals stay home provides the protection to remove other administratively burdensome protocols.

The following bullets provide a summary of the COVID protocols for the 2022-2023 pastoral year, with additional detail in the sections below:

- Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 or any illness should stay home while sick.
- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate from all parish activities for five days. Upon their return, no masks are required if they test negative on/after day 5.
- Absent a negative test, recently positive individuals must mask for days 6-10 and social distance at lunch.
- PCR tests, professionally administered antigen/rapid tests, and home tests are allowed in any situation requiring a test. Note that PCR tests are not recommended when returning post isolation, as their sensitivity will likely result in positive readings post infectious period.
- Based on data collected since removal of the mask mandate earlier this year, contact tracing is no longer required. Close contacts will no longer be identified, and thus no longer be required to mask, quarantine or social distance at lunchtime.
- Parishes should inform families of all in-classroom or youth group, positive COVID-19 cases. Families are encouraged to take any precautions they consider appropriate.
- When there are three cases in a classroom within a 10-day period, all children in that classroom or youth group must mask for 10 days.

- While vaccinations are recommended to help prevent serious symptoms, there is no vaccination requirement for either students or staff.

Masks - Use, Refusals and Exemptions

Mask Use:

Masks remain optional for all parishes within the Archdiocese of Chicago with two exceptions:

- Anyone returning from a 5-day isolation (i.e., recently positive) who has not tested negative on/after day 5 must wear a mask when indoors on days 6 – 10.
- In situations where a classroom has 3 or more positive cases within a ten-day period, the entire classroom may be required to mask for ten days from the last day of attendance of the third case. In the event of additional cases in that classroom within the 10-day masking period, the mask mandate will be capped at the 10-days after the onset of the 3rd consecutive case within the 10-day period and cannot be extended.

Protocol for Symptomatic Individuals Not Yet Confirmed with COVID

- Any individuals who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home regardless of vaccination status to minimize the chance of spreading COVID-19 or other germs and viruses.
- Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.
- If symptoms resolve within 24 hours, an individual may return to parish activities.
- If symptoms last longer than 24 hours, an individual must receive a negative COVID-19 test or alternative medical diagnosis prior to returning to parish programs.
- Parishes should consider known, child-specific chronic conditions when determining whether a child should remain home. For example, a child with known allergies would not need to stay home with sneezing and a runny nose if no other symptoms are present.

Protocol for Individuals Confirmed with COVID

Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate for a full 5 days regardless if symptoms are present or not and regardless if symptoms resolve before the 5 days are complete.

- For symptomatic people, Day 1 is the first full day after symptoms develop.
- For asymptomatic people, Day 1 is the first full day after the positive test is administered.

If the person is asymptomatic or symptoms resolve before the fifth day, the individual must still complete the full five days of isolation. After five-day isolation, individuals that test negative on or after day 5 may return to parish activities mask optional, while individuals not testing or testing positive may return but must wear a mask around others through day 10. Rapid and home tests are both allowable when returning day 6 to resume mask optional. PCR tests are discouraged on day 5 or after due to their increased sensitivity and processing time.

Individuals with symptoms lasting longer than five days must wait until they are fever-free and symptoms mostly resolved for 24 hours before leaving isolation.

Cases only must be reported to the archdiocese if three or more confirmed cases occur concurrently within a class or meeting group. Reporting of three or more concurrent cases can be done by emailing Jen Seymour at jseymour@archchicago.org.

Vaccination Policy

The Archdiocese is not collecting COVID-19 vaccination information for children, youth, volunteers or staff in Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic parishes.

Air Quality – Windows and Air Purification

Improving air quality remains one of the most effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID and other airborne viruses within a classroom or group setting. When weather permits, opening windows introduces fresh air into a room and is the preferred approach for air quality improvement.