

COVID-19 Guidance, updated since emergence of aggressive Omicron variant
Revised December 20, 2021

In response to the [emergence](#) of the highly contagious Omicron variant, Bishop Holston and leaders of the South Carolina Conference have updated our [COVID-19 Best Practices](#). Local churches are strongly encouraged to review their current practices to ensure the health and safety of all.

In the tradition of John Wesley, who believed in the value of science and medicine, Bishop Holston affirms the following guidance for in-person worship and other gatherings, compiled by a team of South Carolina United Methodist pastors and laity:

- All eligible persons – anyone age 5 and older – are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated and to receive a booster shot as soon as possible. [Schedule an appointment](#).
- Everyone should wear masks at all times when indoors – including choirs and those waiting to receive communion.
- Everyone should practice social distancing when indoors – including while waiting to receive communion.
- Local churches should hold events outdoors, including drive-up services, whenever possible. Outdoors is always safer than indoors.
- Please remember, persons 65 and older and those with weak immune systems due to health conditions are more susceptible to COVID-19, even when vaccinated. Everyone is encouraged to wear masks out of respect and love for them.

Local churches are strongly urged to continue to follow the latest guidance from the State [Department of Health and Environmental Control](#), as they make the health and safety of their congregations and communities their top priority.

Bishop Holston and conference leaders recognize that there are differences of opinion in many congregations about the best way to respond to COVID-19. We urge patience and understanding as we continue to seek the best ways to serve God and one another together.

Guidance for Responding to Attendee Reporting Positive COVID-19 Test

1) At every church event – including worship – announce that anyone present should notify the church immediately if they test positive for COVID-19 within the next five days.

2) Maintain an attendance list for each person attending a church event – including worship – to ensure that it has names and accurate contact information (email address or phone number).

3) Upon being notified of a positive test, provide a courtesy notification to everyone else on the attendance list for that event. That should include: • Advising that someone who attended has tested positive for COVID-19. • Recommending that each person monitor themselves for symptoms. • If symptoms occur, recommending testing and notifying the pastor of the test results.

4) Church leadership should consider whether – based on their size and circumstances – to suspend for 10 days the services or programs during which the potential exposure took place. EXAMPLE: If someone who attended a 9 a.m. worship service tests positive for COVID-19, consider suspending the 9 a.m. service for 10 days. If that person also attended a Sunday School class, consider also suspending that class for 10 days.

5) Notify the district superintendent that the above guidance has been activated.