

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LOCAL CHURCHES DURING THE CORONA EPIDEMIC

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CHURCH ACTIVITIES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

During the coronavirus epidemic, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Finland (Suomen Adventtikirkko) has emphasized the need to ensure safety, safe distancing and good hand hygiene. After the end of the emergency conditions gatherings, events, meals and the Lord's supper can be arranged, as long as the above-mentioned issues are considered. So far, we have avoided serious infections, but exposures have occurred. We hope that the members of the local churches will take the threat of illness seriously before the situation gets out of hand.

We recommend that local church boards decide on policies to follow to minimize the risk of infection in church activities. Local churches should actively instruct people that only healthy people can attend the meetings. Individuals with respiratory or flu symptoms (including runny nose, cough, fever, nausea and diarrhea) cannot physically participate in church events or service activities. Those at risk should also be encouraged to exercise caution and use their own judgment when participating in church activities. **If a person suspects corona infection, it is best to go for a test in your local area as soon as possible and be in voluntary quarantine until the result of the test is known.**

Safety distancing

Safety distances (1–2 m) should be taken into account both when being in the church hall, as well as when entering or leaving the church. Greeters (handshakes and hugs should be avoided) can remind those who come to church and the worship director even after the program is over. For example, the worship director can instruct church members to leave the premises at different times.

Hygiene

We recommend that those who come to and from the church events wash their hands thoroughly and use hand sanitizer already in the hallway. Coughing occurs on the sleeve or handkerchief.

Using the mask

The use of a mask is optional, but its use is recommended if a safe distance cannot be maintained.

We recommend using a mask when it is difficult to avoid close contact (e.g. entering or leaving church events). This should be taken into account, especially in those areas where, according to the Finnish health officials' report, there have been coronary infections / exposures during the last two weeks (the situation can be checked here: <https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/situation-update-on-coronavirus>)

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Singing

We do not require restrictions on singing at church events, but we ask church members to be aware of the risks involved. Note that singing breathes microbes into the air, so it would be a good idea to wear a mask while singing, possibly limiting the risk of infection. Humming is also a good way to participate in a group song.

Communion services during corona

Church (seating instructions also during other church meetings)

Instruct the participants to sit in the church in every other row of benches where families can sit side by side, and others at safety intervals of a couple of meters (preferably 2 empty chairs). Each member should disinfect their hands when entering the church and avoid facial contact.

Foot washing

Keep the foot washing room spacious so that the safety distances are maintained. There is close contact in foot washing, so the use of face masks is recommended. You should also pay special attention to hand hygiene and wash or disinfect your hands before and after the foot washing.

The Lord's supper

The bread breaker should wear disposable gloves when delivering supper. Bread and wine dispensers should also wear disposable gloves. Distributors serve by giving participants a piece of bread in their hands, meaning no one takes the bread themselves. In order to avoid contacts and movement of people back and forth, it would be desirable for the wine to be served / handed out on bench rows as well. The return of wine glasses should be arranged so that the glass can be left under the chair on the floor, where it will be collected for washing after the event. This avoids extra movement and contact.

If it is difficult for the congregation to hold the Lord's supper safely while minimizing coronary risks, it is recommended to refrain from arranging the event for the time being. It can be agreed with the pastor to receive the communion privately.

Meals

During the state of emergency, we recommended refraining from joint gatherings and meals. We continue to demand that the local churches that organize meals and potlucks act responsibly. Our recommendation is that potlucks and meals be arranged taking into account safety distances. Foods offered should have food and beverage dispensers that are protected with disposable gloves and face masks. For the time being, we do not recommend self-service / buffet-style potlucks or meals. This way, we minimize the risk of infection through serving spoons and close contact.

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Dining areas and tables should be designed and arranged so that meals take place with safety distances in mind. Members of the same family can eat close together.

List of participants

Healthcare professionals seek to identify the chains of infection from those infected with corona as accurately as possible in order to limit the spread of virus.

We recommend that the names of persons who have attended church events be listed so that when an infected person / member becomes ill, they can contact other people present and inform them of possible exposure. The collection of names should take place at the beginning of each event and it is advisable to organize an active member who already knows or identifies the members of the congregation (elder of the congregation, secretary, member secretary, etc.). In addition to the name, visitors should be asked for a telephone number in case of possible contact and why they are asked for contact information.

The list of participants must be kept private and protected from outsiders. The pastor, elder, or secretary / member secretary of the church will inform about the possible exposure to the persons on the list. They have contact information for church members. Note! The name of the person should not be mentioned when informing about the risk of exposure! This list of participants will be kept for three to four weeks, after which it must be properly disposed of, either in a shredder, by incineration or by cutting into unidentified shreds.

The disclosure of contact information is voluntary. It is therefore important to explain why data is collected, how it is used and finally destroyed.

Learn more

More information on the current guidelines and restrictions can be found here:
<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/information-on-coronavirus/current-restrictions>