

Dear Hope Community RPC Congregation,

We are writing to inform you of some changes in our approach to providing a safe environment during worship from the standpoint of respiratory infections. These changes reflect recent changes in CDC recommendations which provide less restrictive guidelines. The most noticeable change in our building is that we are eliminating the “mask-only” section of seating.

We thank God that deaths and serious illness from COVID have decreased dramatically. At the height of the pandemic, COVID accounted for 29% of all deaths in the United States. Today it still accounts for 2% of all deaths but the risk of death or serious illness is disproportionately borne by those over 70, the very young, pregnant women, and those who are immune compromised. These same groups are especially vulnerable to Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) as well. The new CDC recommendations simplify things by providing a common approach to all of these respiratory viruses.

At Hope, our approach during the COVID pandemic emergency was that we share a responsibility to provide a safe worship environment for more vulnerable people among us, even though it might at times cause us inconvenience or make us somewhat less comfortable. We do this out of gratitude for the love we have received in Christ and biblical imperatives to care for the weak in the covenant community. A safe worship environment for all continues to be our goal.

Since in worship there will be people who have increased risk factors, we continue to recommend following the new CDC guidelines* (as summarized below). **If you are sick** with respiratory virus symptoms that aren't better explained by another cause (for example – a known allergy) the CDC recommendations applied to us are that:

- You initially stay home and utilize the livestream.
- When your symptoms have been getting better overall and you have not had a fever for at least 24 hours (without medication), you may:
 - return to public gatherings but should wear a well-fitted mask for the first five days to avoid possibly spreading germs to others.
 - OR wait for five days before returning to public gatherings,

We will continue our efforts to provide satisfactory ventilation and air exchange in the sanctuary and other areas of the building. Although we are eliminating the mask-only section, please be aware that to provide adequate airflow through this area some windows must remain open. Therefore, you might find that section of the sanctuary cooler in the winter and warmer in the summer.

You will also see new wording in the bulletin to reflect this updated approach. Our committee is also seeking to help address other issues related to health in our building and welcomes your input.

We praise God for his mercy to us and for preserving our lives each day.

In Christ,

The former “Covid Response Committee” in conjunction with the Session

* <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/index.html>