

The Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee

The Wilderness Road

Introduction

Dear Clergy and Parishioners of the Diocese of Tennessee,

These are extraordinary times. None of us have experienced a public health crisis of this scope or magnitude before. This is a societal-wide event with grave consequences, especially for those most at risk in our society. The Coronavirus seems to have swept into most corners of the globe. It has far-reaching political and economic consequences. **The challenges are unprecedented in our lifetimes.**

Among its many other effects, the virus has challenged most aspects of the church's ministry: liturgical, pastoral, educational, evangelical, and missional. In these respects, the church in this time has not had the luxury of continuing in its familiar patterns of ministry. **In the Diocese of Tennessee, being "open, obedient, responsive, and committed" has taken new forms in the time of the virus.** Our clergy and parishioners have been faithful in responding and adapting to this new situation, even as we feel grief at the absence of loved ones and face anxiety about the future.

I now call you to join me, as we in our diocese take the "wilderness road" described in Acts 8. At that time, the members of the church in Jerusalem were scattered and dispersed, making their way into the world under the pressure of persecution. Yet God was at work, giving new opportunities for the church's mission and ministry. Philip the deacon, one of those driven from Jerusalem, was able to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection in new ways, in new places, that gave the message of the gospel renewed scope and scale.

In his encounter with the court official from Ethiopia on the wilderness road to Gaza, Philip was able to evangelize and share the faith, through proclamation, preparation, and baptism. The dialogue between the two centered around the understanding of the Scriptures, and the identity of Jesus as the one foretold by Isaiah. Their conversation resulted in the request for baptism, and initiation into the Christian community. "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:37). This baptism, tradition tells us, resulted in the evangelism of Ethiopia and the introduction of Christianity to parts far away.

The “Wilderness Road (Acts 8)” outlined here is not just a road to re-opening facilities. More importantly, it’s a challenge to enter more deeply into relationship with Christ, to engage the Holy Scriptures more fully, and to discover new ways to share our faith and extend the ministry of the church to our friends, our neighbors, and our fellow parishioners. It’s an invitation to connect with Jesus and with each other in his name.

In the time of this pandemic, I invite you to think about the path forward as not simply the way back to where we were before. Instead, it is a “wilderness road.” It’s not the obvious path; it will be full of switchbacks and washed out places. Gathering while traveling this road will look different and take different forms from what we’ve known before. **We have been jolted out of our well-worn patterns of church life, in order to re-discover older and more fundamental truths about our identity as Christians.**

Walking a wilderness road is not easy, but it is our way forward into the world. I commend to you these guidelines for our re-gathering. We will not be walking in lockstep in our different congregations, but we will all be traveling the same road. **I challenge you to claim what you have learned as a disciple of Jesus in this time of pandemic.** The road is not one leading back to business as usual. God is always creating a future for us, and continues to invite us to step through the door.

Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement in this ministry we share. Again, these are extraordinary times. God bless you as we continue to engage together in the mission and ministry of the church.

+ John Bauerschmidt

The Rt Rev’d John Bauerschmidt, Bishop of Tennessee

Guidelines & Prerequisites For Transition in Congregational Life and a Return to Public In Person Worship:

BACKGROUND

As our state moves into the initial stages of reopening following the Governor's Safer at Home order, there will be many questions from clergy and parishioners about ongoing congregational life, and a return to public in person worship.. The first thing to note is that while national and state directives will apply to all within the Diocese of Tennessee, directives from local civil authorities that are pertinent in each community will also need to be met. Congregations in Davidson County, for example, will need to meet directives of metro government as well as state requirements.

As we follow the Wilderness Road, in this time of pandemic, the following list of requirements & recommendations shall serve as guidance for our clergy and congregations as they identify procedures that are fitting for their context.

Churches, because of the communal nature of our life and worship, are unlikely to be able to gather as usual for some time even after other parts of society emerge from safer at home orders. This means that as society reopens in phases, congregations should imagine what their ministries will look like at each stage of the process.

STAGES

Reopening will not happen all at once. There will be no flipping of a switch that will return us to our situation before the pandemic. Congregations will be expected to follow the phases of reopening in effect in their communities, augmented where necessary by the Diocesan guidelines below.

We will all be following the Wilderness Road, but there will be divergence and "staggering" within out congregations depending on a number of factors: number of members, size of physical space, availability and reasonableness of outdoor worship spaces, local health guidelines from civil authorities (federal, state, local, and municipality). Even when congregations begin to gather in person again within a similar time frame, their discernment may differ in regard to timetable, as to

which groups will begin gathering first, and what form worship may take. This is reasonable and should be expected.

Congregations must be prepared for returning to an earlier stage, depending on the state of public health and the direction of civil authority, as well as diocesan guidance.

This document should not be viewed as a requirement to open on a specific date or to offer specific forms of gathering: these details will be worked out with your leadership. Please inform the Diocese of your plans, by emailing Canon Howard at JHoward@edtn.org, so that we will be informed, and be able to offer guidance as needed.

Stages along the Wilderness Road might be conceived of within the following framework, in conjunction with and taking under advisement all applicable guidelines from public health officials:

Stage I: Preparing to reopen: This is the stage where we find ourselves now. The set of Prerequisites below are most applicable to this stage.

Stage II: Early stage of reopening: You should be selective about what activities return to your facilities, and in what order. This time of transition is the one of greatest stress in the community, as new patterns are laid down, though also a time of increased energy. It may be that some activities will be either limited or impossible because of the requirements of physical distance. New opportunities for ministry will be present. Every parish group and gathering, as well as worship, will be affected. Parish offices may reopen. Online resources such as live streaming and video conference tools should continue to be employed to augment in person gathering. The Ongoing Requirements and Recommendations below apply to all activities.

Stage III: Later stage of reopening: The in person gathering of larger groups will become possible, though numerical limitations will still apply, depending on requirements of civil authorities and diocesan guidance. Again, there will be new opportunities for ministry. There will be continued stress in the community, but increased adaptation. Continued use of technology. The Ongoing Requirements and Recommendations below apply to all activities.

Stage IV: A New Normal: Not simply a return to life before the pandemic. There will be ongoing health considerations not present before. New patterns of ministry have developed. Diocese and congregation incorporate the experience into their life. We will still be on the Wilderness Road.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Public Health Guidelines

Familiarize yourself and your congregational leadership (Vestry, Mission Council, and various ministries involved with worship--Ushers, Altar Guild, Eucharistic Ministers etc.) with all Federal, State, and Local guidelines and recommendations that apply to your congregation. Be aware of all guidance shared by the Bishop, and make sure your leadership is also familiar with it.

Continuing Streaming Worship & Online Formation

Even after we are again able to gather in our spaces for worship, Bible study, or other types of formation, some members of our communities will be unable to take part due to health concerns and their own discernment. Some may be at increased risk due to age or underlying health conditions. Others may continue isolating because of others in their household, or for a set period because of the potential that they have been exposed to the virus.

Consider what practices you have developed during the period of sheltering in place that could reasonably continue. You may find that the resumption of activities at the church means you cannot keep up the same schedule in regard to online offerings. Consider what other congregations are doing and, where appropriate, direct people within your congregation to those, as well as your own. Have conversations with your fellow clergy and see if you might partner to provide online resources that you could each direct your congregants toward, e.g. someone does a weekly Bible study, and another does a Sunday School presentation.

Gathering

The ability to gather together once more for worship or other aspects of congregational life presents its challenges. Continued physical distancing guidelines will necessitate six feet of space between households.

Additionally, the CDC recommends the wearing of masks in “in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.”¹ This means that masks will be a regular part of our lives in many cases, including within the church.

Upon reopening, consider a coffee hour that doesn't include food or beverages, to limit an avenue of potential transmission.

¹ CDC, *The Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of Covid-19*:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Imagination will be in order when considering potential service schedule or location changes that might support physical distancing.

A Note Regarding People At Greater Risk

Throughout the process of reopening, as it has been during the initial stages of addressing the threat of COVID-19, the safety of people who meet the varied criteria of increased risk for infection, or potential for negative outcomes, has been a grave concern. Notice should be taken of the consistent refrain in government documents and public health guidelines that those who are at risk, whether because they are over 65 years of age, or because of underlying health conditions, should be encouraged to continue to remain home for the immediate future. We take this guidance seriously.

Clergy and congregational leaders should approach pastoral conversations that might result from this guidance with due respect for the capacity of individuals for decision making..

PREREQUISITES

- Adhere to the guidance of local public health authorities, as well as any guidance issued by the Bishop.
- Observe all limitations as to size of gatherings allowed by civil authorities.
- Maintain physical distancing at all times until such requirements are lifted by local health authorities.
- Deep clean your entire church facility.
- Share the preparations you have undertaken with your congregation and with the Diocese.
- Inform parishioners of risks and encourage those who are at higher risk (those who are sixty-five years of age or who have underlying health conditions) remain home and join online instead.
- All those who are unable to attend in person gatherings should have resources available to them, either created by their home parish, or commended to them by it, for their spiritual nurture. This could include livestreamed worship, online Bible studies, or other digital or printed material.

ONGOING REQUIREMENTS

- Communicate your plans as they evolve with Diocesan House staff (email Canon Howard at JHoward@edtn.org).
- All officiants or other leaders (e.g. Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, ushers, Bible study leaders etc.) should take their temperatures the evening before and immediately prior to public

services or other gatherings. Anyone registering a fever should let their priest or other leaders know so that substitutes may be found or other plans of action may be taken.

- Should someone you have been in close proximity to within the past 14 days be diagnosed with Covid-19 or display potential symptoms (fever etc), be tested and self-isolate/refrain from leading or attending in-person gatherings of any sort pending a negative result of the test, up to 14 days.
- Guidelines that were released earlier regarding the Eucharist should be followed as in person worship returns: intinction is not a safe alternative, and people should be reminded that they are fully comuned if they receive in only one kind (bread or wine alone). Morning Prayer or a Liturgy of the Word (Ante Communion) remain options for Sunday worship.
- Gently and gracefully correct unsafe practices when encountered. You may designate vestry members or other leaders with this task as well. We cannot force people to observe guidance, but we can be clear and gracious with them.
- Physical Distancing: While the guidance of the Governor currently indicates that houses of worship may reopen at 50% capacity, the Guidelines of the White House currently indicate that gatherings in excess of ten people should be avoided in contexts where physical distancing may be difficult to maintain. Given this, we suggest adhering to the rule of no less than 200 Square feet of building space per occupant at a given time.
- **Increased Cleaning:**
 - Increased cleaning by cleaning crew or church staff/volunteers. Daily and post-worship sanitizing of high touch areas such as doors, water fountains, sink handles, bathroom doors, altar rail, etc.
 - All spaces should be thoroughly cleaned following their use by any group. This, along with the requirements of physical distancing, may make the meeting of community support groups such as AA, NA etc. more challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to offer live streamed services as you reopen for the at-risk population.
- For the clergy, continued participation in weekly meetings with diocesan clergy to learn of developing/emerging plans.

- If possible in your circumstance, consider contracting with a cleaning agency to provide periodic disinfectant services in high-traffic areas and the nave.
- **Remind people:** Continue to offer reminders, verbally, in newsletters and through printed signage about your plan, including the importance of non-contact greetings and refraining from shaking hands or hugging.
- **Given that Physical Distancing will be in place for the foreseeable future, the following should be kept in mind:**
 - **Worship Spaces:** Throughout this time period, a rule of thumb might be that the largest possible space for a gathering--either a Bible study or worship--would be best. For those parishes with access to a suitable outdoor space, outdoor worship may be reasonable, weather permitting, particularly when first beginning to gather again.
 - At this time the 200 square feet of building space per household is a good rule of thumb where numerical caps are not in effect (current White House guidelines are 10 persons in any area that is difficult to maintain physical distancing, while the Governor has said 50% occupancy. We believe the balance of using square footage is a good compromise for churches).
 - **Service Attendance:** Once you and your leadership feel prepared and comfortable reopening, you may need to come up with means of staggering attendance at services in order to facilitate physical distancing. There are numerous approaches. You might:
 - Have sign ups for a limited number of spots per service.
 - Stagger attendance based on giving parishioners odd or even numbers, dividing them into groups by last name etc.
 - You may offer more frequent services. If you do so, consider how many services one officiant (ordained or lay) might lead.
 - In a multi-staff situation, consider how many of your clergy are in the same space for the time being, to avoid more than one clergy person potentially being simultaneously exposed and self-quarantining.
- **Bulletins:** Rather than having an usher hand out materials, consider having them keep their distance and direct congregants or visitors to a welcome table with bulletins and other information.

- Do not reuse bulletins, but recycle after one use.
- **The Offering:** Do not pass offering plates during this time. Encourage electronic giving or mailed checks. Have an offering box or something similar set up so those who bring their offering can leave it.
- **Choir:** Suspend in-person choir practice. Consider limiting musical offerings to soloists or duets for a time, and practice increased physical distancing when doing so (singing can spread aerosols as far as a cough, so personal space “bubbles” should be increased accordingly). Choirs have been the location for certain “super spreader” events, and we want to avoid such a scenario.
- **Congregational singing:** Some congregations may determine not to engage in singing. Others may wonder whether singing may be done while wearing masks. We know that some places (Germany, for example, and closer to home in some Dioceses) have mandated that congregations not sing during this time. The reality seems to be that singing, like many other activities, can be a calculated risk. We recommend that congregational singing not take place without masks, but note that the benefits of singing are not limited to the sound. Singing, however, like coughing or a violent sneeze, can spread aerosols beyond the 6 feet of separation required by physical distancing.
- **Childcare:** We recommend not offering childcare until your local government reaches the final stages of reopening. Adhering to physical distancing in a childcare environment seems unlikely, and families may feel a greater need or desire to remain together as a unit.
- **Eucharistic Visitors:** limit the frequency of home visits. Ensure that Eucharistic Visitors follow the same guidelines as clergy in regard to taking their temperature and self isolating. Visit only one parishioner per rotation, with lengthy gaps (14 days) between visits.
- **Hospital visits:** The same guidance as any in person meeting or Eucharistic visit should be followed, with the additional caveat that the requirements of the specific medical facility be honored.
- **Youth Groups:** consider limiting indoor meetings until the local government reaches the final stages of reopening.
 - Consider cancelling all overnight summer youth trips
- **Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction:** For the time being, consider continuing to offer video conferencing as an option for all committees, small groups, or one on one meetings. In-person meetings can occur on a scheduled basis (keeping in mind the

numerical limits on gathering so that the total number of people in your parish offices do not exceed the cap) with masks worn and physical distancing observed.

- **Outreach groups:** Parish outreach should adhere to the same physical distancing guidelines as other groups within the church.
- **Masks:** Clergy and parishioners should come back to church wearing masks and follow the recommendations of the CDC and other public health officials regarding their use.

APPENDIX A: DETAILED GUIDELINES FOR MEETINGS & VISITS

- ***Observing Guidelines of local public health officials.***
 - All clergy in charge of congregations are expected to become familiar with the guidelines and regulations being implemented in their local jurisdiction, and to follow them to the best of their ability. Different areas of the Diocese of Tennessee are operating on different timetables, and may continue to be out of sync based upon local conditions.
 - You can find information about your local and regional health offices here: <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/localdepartments.html>

- Meetings
 - Clergy should establish protocols to schedule meetings with parishioners and other members of the community. In the initial stages of reopening, it may be wise to continue to utilize online platforms where feasible.
 - Care should be taken that meetings do not result in a higher number of people being present in the church facility than is appropriate based upon the 200 square feet per person rule of thumb.

- Visitation
 - As with leading worship, clergy or EV should take their temperatures before visiting or meeting with anyone.
 - Those who are to be visited should also take their temperatures and be symptom free before the visit.
 - Clergy should ensure that Eucharistic Visitors understand that Physical distancing is to be maintained, and should practice it themselves when visiting. This means remaining at least six feet away from the person being visited.
 - The date and time of the visit should be logged, and either party should notify the other in the event of COVID-19 symptoms developing, or in the event of a positive test result.

APPENDIX B: CLEANING RECOMMENDATIONS²

Cleaning And Disinfecting Your Facility

Everyday Steps, Steps When Someone is Sick, and Considerations for Employers

How to clean and disinfect

Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect.

Clean

- **Clean surfaces using soap and water.** Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.

High touch surfaces include:

Tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.

Disinfect

- Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant.
- **Recommend use of EPA-registered household disinfectant.** Follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product.

Many products recommend:

- Keeping surface wet for a period of time (see product label)
- Precautions such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.



- **Diluted household bleach solutions may also be used** if appropriate for the surface. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

Leave solution on the surface for **at least 1 minute**

To make a bleach solution, mix:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water
- OR
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water
- **Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol.**

Soft surfaces

For soft surfaces such as **carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes**

- **Clean the surface using soap and water** or with cleaners appropriate for use on these surfaces.



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[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

² Available from the Centers for Disease Control, here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

- **Laundry items** (if possible) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.

OR

- **Disinfect with an EPA-registered household disinfectant.** [These disinfectants](#) meet EPA's criteria for use against COVID-19.

Electronics

- For electronics, such as **tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines**

- Consider putting a **wipeable** cover on electronics.
- **Follow manufacturer's instruction** for cleaning and disinfecting.
 - If no guidance, **use alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol.** Dry surface thoroughly.

Laundry

For clothing, towels, linens and other items

- **Wear disposable gloves.**

- **Wash hands with soap and water** as soon as you remove the gloves.
- **Do not shake** dirty laundry.
- Launder items according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the **warmest appropriate water setting** and dry items completely.
- Dirty laundry from a sick person **can be washed with other people's items.**
- Clean and **disinfect clothes hampers** according to guidance above for surfaces.

Cleaning and disinfecting your building or facility if someone is sick

- **Close off areas** used by the sick person.
 
- **Open outside doors and windows** to increase air circulation in the area. **Wait 24 hours** before you clean or disinfect. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
 
- Clean and disinfect **all areas used by the sick person**, such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines.
- If **more than 7 days** since the sick person visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
 - Continue routine cleaning and disinfection.

When cleaning

- **Wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.**

 - Additional personal protective equipment (PPE) might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area.
- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for 20 seconds.
 - Always wash immediately after removing gloves and after contact with a sick person.

- Hand sanitizer: If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.

- **Additional key times to wash hands** include:

- After blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- After using the restroom.
- Before eating or preparing food.
- After contact with animals or pets.
- Before and after providing routine care for another person who needs assistance (e.g., a child).

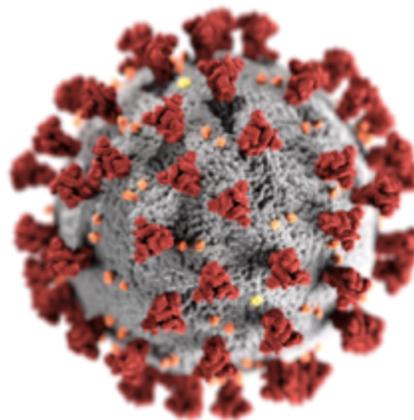
Additional Considerations for Employers



- **Educate workers** performing cleaning, laundry, and trash pick-up to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19.
- Provide instructions **on what to do if they develop symptoms within 14 days** after their last possible exposure to the virus.
- Develop **policies for worker protection and provide training** to all cleaning staff on site prior to providing cleaning tasks.
 - Training should include when to use PPE, what PPE is necessary, how to properly don (put on), use, and doff (take off) PPE, and how to properly dispose of PPE.
- Ensure workers are **trained on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals** used in the workplace in accordance with OSHA's Hazard Communication standard ([29 CFR 1910.1200](#)).
- **Comply** with OSHA's standards on Bloodborne Pathogens ([29 CFR 1910.1030](#)), including proper disposal of regulated waste, and PPE ([29 CFR 1910.132](#)).

For facilities that house people overnight:

- Follow CDC's guidance for [colleges and universities](#). Work with state and local health officials to determine the best way to isolate people who are sick and if temporary housing is needed.
- For guidance on cleaning and disinfecting a sick person's bedroom/bathroom, review CDC's guidance on [disinfecting your home if someone is sick](#).



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APPENDIX C: OTHER RESOURCES

- ***The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:***
 - Checklist for Faith-based and Community Leaders:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html>
 - Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/ReOpening_America_Cleaning_Disinfection_Decision_Tool.pdf
 - Cleaning & Disinfecting:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
 - FAQs for Administrators and Leaders at Community and Faith-Based Organizations:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-faith-based/faq.html>
 - Guidance on Covid-19 testing:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>
- ***Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security COVID-19 page:***
centerforhealthsecurity.org/resources/COVID-19/index.html

Appendix D: CDC Guidelines on Wearing a Cloth Mask to slow the spread of Covid-19

Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

How to Wear Cloth Face Coverings

Cloth face coverings should—

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

CDC on Homemade Cloth Face Coverings

CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), **especially** in areas of significant community-based transmission.

CDC also advises the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance.

The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

Should cloth face coverings be washed or otherwise cleaned regularly? How regularly?

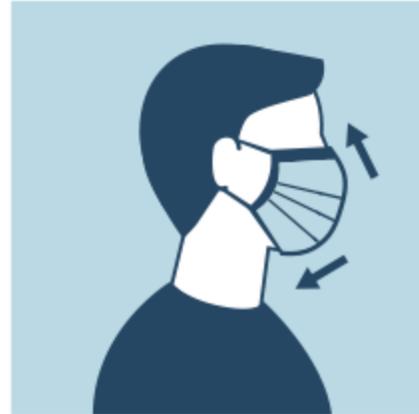
Yes. They should be routinely washed depending on the frequency of use.

How does one safely sterilize/clean a cloth face covering?

A washing machine should suffice in properly washing a cloth face covering.

How does one safely remove a used cloth face covering?

Individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their cloth face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)