

**Subject:** ENEWS: Together, Again

**Date:** Monday, August 22, 2022 at 9:01:50 AM Central Daylight Time

**From:** Wisconsin Council of Churches on behalf of Wisconsin Council of Churches



## Together, Again

By Rev. Daniel Schultz, WCC Community Health Program Director

Dear Friends:

This was supposed to be an article focused on COVID and the new school year. After all, COVID is now one of the top ten causes of child deaths in the US, and a leading cause of hospitalization. We intended to encourage the use of safe and effective vaccines as kids returned to school and religious education programs. We still do!

But then the [CDC updated its COVID guidelines](#), which complicates the picture.

In short, the CDC is less focused on preventing infection than hospitalization. There are some arguments in favor of this strategy. Over 90% of the population has some form of natural or acquired immunity. Testing and anti-viral medications are more available than in the past. It's not a good use of resources to try to stop the spread of a disease that appears to be going nowhere anytime soon. And the public has much less appetite for broad social interventions than it once did.

The new guidelines will help churches, businesses and particularly schools remain open. Even as infections more than likely increase, the number of absent students will drop. That's good for education, and for parents trying to balance work and childcare.

But the guidance depends on individuals to act responsibly. It's up to us to practice diligent testing and masking after infection. Worse, the guidelines rely on vulnerable people to protect themselves by avoiding crowded indoor events or masking in public. That disproportionately affects the elderly, whose immune systems often struggle to meet viral threats, and kids, who don't control their daily environment.

Meanwhile, the virus keeps mutating. It may continue its habit of becoming less threatening but more easily spread—or it may not. This is a particular worry for children, who are most prone to COVID reinfection. Monkeypox is also emerging as a concern. The coming [flu season will be complicated](#), both in delivering shots and in predicting how severe the season will be.

If this leaves you confused and apprehensive, we're there with you. We will all have to make individual choices about when to mask, when to test, when to stay home or go out. As [one commentator puts it](#), that's a very medical, very American perspective. But it's not the approach public health professionals would take.

Nor does it square easily with community-oriented ethics. As WCC medical advisor Geof Swain says, masking protects everyone. Why wouldn't you want to require it in an indoor setting?

The WCC is not adjusting its [COVID guidelines for congregations](#) in light of the new CDC guidance. The situation remains much too dangerous, particularly for vulnerable members of our communities.

Neither individuals nor communities need to be heroes in this moment. But there are things we can do. Take responsible action and think about ways to help put collective supports in place. Along with our other guidelines, we encourage you to:

- **Limit capacity in indoor spaces.** The fewer potentially infected people sharing air in a room, the better. We also encourage congregations to consider upgrading air ventilation and filtration systems.
- **Wear high-quality masks indoors.** N95s or KN95s are best, followed by surgical masks.
- **Get up to date with vaccinations and boosters.** Don't wait or try to time your shot. If a COVID vaccine or booster is available, take it as soon as you can. Encourage young families in particular to do the same. Children remain the lowest-vaccinated group in the population. Get caught up on flu shots and common vaccines as well. Again, they are safe and effective, and the better protected we all are, the better protected we all are.
- **Stay home if you're sick, even a little.** Dr. Swain points out that this can be tricky: What seems like seasonal allergies is often just that. But it's also the kind of sacrifice we should make and support others in making, says Swain. Playing it safe helps prevent the spread of COVID and other airborne viruses. Make it a general expectation that community members take part remotely if they're not feeling well. Give a gentle nudge to people with visible symptoms to take care of their health at home.
- **Test early, test often.** It's important to check your status regularly. If you suspect you might have an infection, or if you're getting over one, test again after 48 hours.

A broader question to consider is how to provide the resources needed for healthy practices. What would it look like to work for a world in which parents could stay home with sick children? In which workers could afford to stay home when they were sick, or be protected in critical positions?

In the near term, the effects of COVID on schools and houses of worship will look very similar this fall. The suggestions on the list above will at least lessen disruption and protect the most vulnerable. The challenge is that they work best when they're done together. Are we up for it? Of course we are!

Stay safe and stay together,

Rev. Daniel Schultz  
Community Health Program Director

Wisconsin Council of Churches | [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org)  
30 W. Mifflin St, Suite 602, Madison, WI 53703  
(608) 837-3108 | [wcoc@wichurches.org](mailto:wcoc@wichurches.org)