

Expectations During Rebounding Idaho Stage 4 and Reopening Oregon Phase 2 (updated 5/17/2021)

The Idaho Conference will continue to follow county, state and federal guidance, through the lens of science to protect the health and safety of our church members and their families and our communities.

We want to strongly reiterate – if you or someone in your household is sick, please do not come to church, Sabbath School or any other function. Please stay home until you are well. If you have a fever, a cough, are sneezing, feeling nauseous, have a headache, please stay home.

Follow your state's stage or phase protocols regarding size of groups. Stage 4 in Idaho allows for unrestricted groups sizes WHEN the Physical Distance and Sanitation requirements are followed. Oregon counties are governed by guidance based on the risk level of each county. The following counties are part of the Idaho Conference: Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Union and Wallowa. As of May 17, 2021, Baker and Malheur counties are in the High Risk category. Grant County is likely to move to the Moderate Risk category. Harney, Union and Wallowa counties are in the Lower Risk category. Follow the county by county information here: <https://coronavirus.oregon.gov/Pages/living-with-covid-19.aspx#currentrisklevelbycountymap>.

We recognize that this has already been a long, long haul. We're all ready to get back to normal. Trust in God is certainly part of our life and how we can get through this. However, God has given us intellect and expects us to use the gifts of knowledge and wisdom that He has given to us. There is also the consideration of protecting your neighbor, whether they live next door to you or sit near you in church. Jesus said in John 15:12 – 13 ESV: *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**"* Along with the benefits we have as future citizens of heaven comes the responsibility to care for others. Remember the early Biblical story of Cain and Abel: Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" Genesis 4:9 ESV. The question itself seems to indicate that yes, we are our brother's keeper.

Minimum Expectations for Children's Sabbath School Programs

The North American Division (NAD) Children's Ministries department has prepared a guide to Reopening Sabbath School: Post-COVID-19. That guide is found on the Idaho Conference website, Health Ministries Department page. The Idaho Conference incorporates the guidance from the North American Division Children's Ministries Department as the **minimum expectations**. Please continue to follow the safety protocols outlined in the plan your church submitted to the conference to have children's Sabbath Schools and Vacation Bible School.

The process:

1. Your children's Sabbath School leaders will submit a plan that meets the minimum expectations to your church board. There will need to be a plan for each level of children's Sabbath School that you have, Beginners/Cradle Roll through Youth. We strongly encourage you to utilize the plan from NAD Children's Ministries (included at the end of this document) as a framework to prepare your plan.

2. If the church board approves the plan, the pastor or elder in charge if there is no pastor will submit the plan to the conference, to Jo Ann Miller (joann.miller@idconf.org).
3. ADCO (conference administration) will either approve the plan or send it back for changes. The areas needing modification will be noted. ADCO will be using NAD Children's Ministries Guide as a framework for approving plans.
4. Once your church's plan has been approved for each Sabbath School division, the pastor/elder in charge will be notified of the date when you can restart your children's Sabbath School divisions.

For those not yet ready to join a physical Sabbath School, consider livestreaming/Zoom from the Sabbath School class, so that those who are remote can join in and interact with those in the physical meeting location.

Vacation Bible School

Churches may hold Vacation Bible School subject to local guidance and must follow protocols for cleanliness and social/physical distancing as best as possible. Use the guidelines for Children's Sabbath School as you plan. If you can do the program outside, even better. However, cleanliness and social distancing still must be followed outside.

Potlucks and Picnics

During Idaho Stage 4 churches may have meals together, including potlucks and picnics. Churches in Oregon will need to follow the county-by-county guidance regarding group size and follow the state's guidance for restaurants. We strongly encourage that you have servers wearing gloves and masks, rather than having them self-serve. It is our expectation that physical distancing and hand hygiene and sanitation practices will be followed. Outdoors where possible would provide the safest environment, with physical distancing still in place. Thank you for your patience as we navigate the reopening of our states together.

Baptisms, Communion and Footwashing

Baptisms, communion and footwashing can happen at the discretion of the pastor and local church leadership. For baptisms, do your best to maintain safe protocols. For communion, use either purchased, single use kits or make your own (prepare communion bread, package in individual bags, it may be difficult to prepare individual containers for grape juice in a safe, hygienic manner) – less contact is best. Have the kits at each designated seating area, rather than handing or passing them out. For footwashing, it is preferable that households wash each other's feet. For those not in the same household, be sure to wash/sanitize hands before and after. It is preferable to use a mask. It is our expectation that physical distancing will be followed.

Back to Normal?

The increased vaccination rates and lower positivity rates have the CDC calling for reduced face covering wearing for those who are fully vaccinated. We appear to be in a place where more normal activities can take place, still with caution. In spite of our common desire to get back to normal, that is unlikely to happen until a treatment protocol and/or vaccination is in place for this coronavirus. God does not give us more burden than we can bear, without giving us the means to bear it.

As conscientious Seventh-day Adventists who proclaim a message of health and wholeness, we care for one another and the stewardship of our collective good health. Let's continue to work together to keep our church family and community healthy as we responsibly reopen our spiritual services.