

**TO:** Pastors & Parochial Administrators  
Directors/Coordinators of Religious Education; Youth Ministry Leaders

**FROM:** James F. Gontis  
Director, Office of Evangelization and Catechesis

**DATE:** 2 September 2021

**RE:** Covid-19 Safety Protocols for Parish Religious Education and Youth Ministry Programs

**CC:** The Very Reverend William C. Forrey, Interim Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia

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As we are looking forward to being in-person for another catechetical year, and as Covid-19 and its variants continue to present challenges, the guidance from federal, state and local authorities varies and is ever-changing. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, is providing, below, instruction for parishes that are holding in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 catechetical/academic year. This plan aims to keep the protection and safety of our parish children foremost by mitigating exposure to the Covid-19 virus.

1. **Acknowledgment Form:** Each student must have this signed and dated by each student's parent(s)/guardian(s) and on file at each parish. If a parent/guardian refuses to sign the Acknowledgment Form, the family may be offered a home-based catechetical plan.
2. **Masks:** All adults, teens and children are to be masked before and during an in-person instruction session and at dismissal until safely outdoors.
  - A. A face mask, covering the mouth and nose, must be worn by all students, teachers, staff and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, when inside our Catholic schools.
  - B. Face masks are not required when:
    - Wearing a mask would cause a medical condition or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues, mental health conditions or a disability.
      - In these cases, a face shield is recommended to be worn.
    - Engaging in an activity that cannot be performed while masked, like eating and drinking or playing a musical instrument.
    - Participating in athletic practices or events, whether indoor or outdoor.
    - The individual is under two (2) years of age.
3. **Social Distancing:** Desks or seating must be at least three feet apart.
4. **Classroom or Instructional space:**
  - **Environment:** Keep well ventilated to the greatest extent possible to circulate fresh air.
  - **Seating Charts:** Important for Covid-19 tracing if someone tests positive and was present at Parish Religious Education class or Parish Youth Ministry session.
  - **Shared School classrooms:** Do not change the desk or other furniture set up.
5. **Educational and Hygienic Supplies:** The parish or families should provide hand sanitizer and tissues; educational materials such as crayons, markers, paper products, etc. should not be shared.

6. **Cleaning and Sanitizing Shared Space:** Rooms, bathrooms, high traffic areas and any shared space is to be cleaned and sanitized after each Parish Religious Education or Youth Ministry session. For guidance, go to: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)
7. **Monitoring Student Health:** Parents/guardians should monitor their child's health and not send a sick child to the Religious Education class or Youth Ministry session.
8. **Tracing and Reporting:** If a student or an adult volunteer tests positive for Covid-19 or a variant, immediately contact the local County/City Department of Health for guidance.
9. **Diocese of Harrisburg Catholic Schools Plan:** For further guidance, please refer to the Diocese of Harrisburg's Catholic Schools Re-Opening Plan Framework 2021-2022 for elements that may pertain to Parish Religious Education or Youth Ministry, see link below: [21-22 Diocesan Reopening Plan version 2 \(hbgdiocese.org\)](http://hbgdiocese.org).