

Covid-19 Phase III Recommendations
NC4 Connect Groups, Bible Studies & Classes
March 12, 2021

With the recent changes to our NC4 Covid-19 Guidelines for large gatherings such as Sunday Worship Services, the Connect Groups guidelines are being updated accordingly. These current guidelines are a sign of hope for the end of the pandemic. We would like these new guidelines to be used to avoid a new surge in cases of Covid-19, but our hope and expectation is that these will not be recommended for too much longer.

Unfortunately, even as I write, we have received news of some attenders of NC4 and some family members who have come down with Covid-19 or have been exposed to someone who has. This only serves to remind us, “we are not over this yet.” And some safe practices are still needed. That said, following are some health guidelines for Connect Group gatherings:

At NC4 buildings –

Please contact Pastor Bob Rentler to discuss availability and requirements for meeting inside the NC4 buildings at our Macungie or Bethlehem Campuses.

- If your group is still willing to meet, or you are planning a new group, we will make every effort to provide an appropriately sized and spaced room.
- If some of your members do not yet feel comfortable attending in the building, there are some options to accommodate those who wish to join the group online or by phone. Please contact Pastor Bob Rentler for options.
- **Note:** This option may be useful post-pandemic if you host a group that may attract members from all campuses.

At Homes –

For Groups meeting in homes, we recommend that you follow these guidelines for the safety of you and your guests. Please think in terms of simple practices that would limit the passing of the virus from a carrier who may or may not be aware that they have the COVID-19 virus.

- Social Distancing – the 6 feet spacing recommendations have been relieved for people who are vaccinated or for people who have reason to be without concern. However, for some people who are still vulnerable or concerned, social distancing should be arranged on their behalf. Of course, there are no spacing recommendations between people who already meet socially outside the group meetings.
- Wear Masks - We are still asking group members to wear masks when people are arriving and socializing. Once group members are seated, masks may be removed at the discretion of the leader and participants. Please be sensitive to others’ concerns. Some group members may yet wish to be masked all the time.
- Masks are not required when seated and not singing. Unfortunately, our beloved shared activity of singing together yet remains a major mechanism for propelling virus-laden droplets.
- Limit Physical Greetings - In general, it is still wise to follow the ongoing practice of being “touchless” with other group members. If members of your group are comfortable, the practice we recommend is simply this, before giving a hug or shaking a hand, ask for permission and honor the wishes of others. For everyone else, hang in there! It will not be long before we’ll be able to hug, shake hands, and “whatever-you-do-for-human-contact” once again.
- Location - If you decide that your group should still safely distance (for health reasons or for comfort of some vulnerable brethren) you need to plan the right location for your meetings. Of course, meeting outdoors is encouraged when the weather permits. (It is 68F outside as I write). And in a few days, entering Daylight Savings Time, we’ll all gain another hour of evening

daylight. If you do meet in homes, open some windows to freshen the air, and thereby reduce the chance of passing the virus.

- Food - We are big proponents of food at small group gatherings, but during this challenging season, we still recommend that groups not share food. If you do choose to eat, encourage members to bring their own beverage and snack, or serve individual portions which will not be share.
- Cleaning - The group host should be prepared to clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched both before and after group (door handles, chairs, restrooms, etc.).
- The Virtual Option – As we offered an option for group meetings inside NC4 Buildings, consider setting up a computer in your meeting area so some vulnerable group members can join in via video conference.
- Childcare - Because young children do not easily practice distancing, if your group does allow children, it is recommended that they only be with others with whom they already regularly interact. Otherwise, we suggest group members not bring children to meetings at this time. However, it is ultimately up to the parents to decide.
- Vulnerable Individuals - Those who are 65+ and un-vaccinated, or who have serious underlying health conditions, are encouraged to join an online small group rather than an in-person one. Groups comprised largely of high-risk individuals are still encouraged to continue meeting virtually.

The newly revised [Phase III Guidelines Letter for NC4 Sunday Service gatherings](#) was published 10 March 21 and [can be accessed here](#).

Before you decide the best option for your group, please check with your group members to make certain how comfortable they feel about this next level of health guidelines. If you have already been practicing less restrictive health measures, then these suggestions will have no impact on your group practices. However, if your group has been shuttered to protect members from this pandemic, perhaps now is the time to consider restarting your group with these health recommendations.

I am trusting group leaders, co-leaders, and hosts to devise the best approach for their group. But, I'm sorry that we had to hear some sobering evidence within NC4 that we are not "out of the woods yet."

While NC4 leaders continue to provide overall guidelines for groups, it is the decision of each group how they will meet the intentions of the guidelines. Our concern remains both the spiritual and the physical health of our group members. But we are also concerned with the emotional health of our members as well. We recognize that some are still nervous about meeting at all. That is understandable - you do not have to. It is your choice! On the other hand, we know that some feel like any sort of meeting restrictions are unnecessary. We are recommending these guidelines because we want to preserve our witness for Jesus to our communities by honoring civil authorities, and because we love one another and don't want to be responsible for any harm coming to them, including a virus outbreak that could affect the lives of many.