

**Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown Response to COVID-19 Pandemic
Update Regarding Summer Activities**

May 10, 2021

After consultation with the Deans, the Vicar General, and Public Health Advisors, Bishop Mark has issued this update in response to the lifting of measures that have been in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Bishop Mark is grateful to all who have been diligent in taking the necessary precautions that have enabled Catholic schools and parish churches to remain open.

As public health officials have been advising repeatedly, wearing Masks and getting vaccinated are key to keeping everyone safe and healthy. With the exception of those who are not to receive the vaccination per their physician's direction, all are encouraged to receive the vaccine as soon as possible. Vaccination and face covering are the most important ways to win the fight against COVID-19.

On May 4, 2021, the Pennsylvania Governor's office announced plans to lift government issued mitigation orders, with one exception. Face coverings (Masks) are still required to be worn indoors and outdoors when you are away from your home.

Per diocesan protocols issued in 2020, this Mask requirement remains in effect in church settings, including attendance at Mass and other religious activities in church (e.g., confessions, adoration, novenas, etc.). As of Memorial Day, May 31, 2021, at 12:01 am, other mitigation efforts, however, may be curtailed. Thus, parishes may resume offertory processions, use hymnals and other materials, fill holy water fonts, and the like. Singing may resume, but only with Masks in place. As a result, parish choirs may not be able to resume their normal function until Masks are no longer required. Confessionals and other enclosed places may be used, but only with adequate ventilation.

The announcement made by the Governor's office indicates that the directives regarding the use of Masks remains in effect even beyond May 31, 2021.

Bishop Mark directs, therefore, that Masks must be worn at any and all indoor functions in schools, parish social halls, etc. Even if not on parish or school property, Masks must also be worn at any indoor function sponsored by a parish, school or affiliated organization.

The lifting of statewide mitigation orders will allow for indoor activities (e.g. Bingo) without the physical distancing measures that have been in effect. However, participants (workers, volunteers, guests, etc.) must wear a face covering at all times during these activities.

Beginning May 31, 2021 at 12:01 am, outdoor picnics, festivals, etc. are permitted on parish property. Parish and church-related organizations (Catholic Daughters, Knights of Columbus,

parish choirs, booster clubs, etc.) may have similar activities. Whenever these activities occur outdoors, Masks are not required.

However, if any part of these outdoor activities takes place indoors, Masks must be worn by all. This circumstance may arise when food preparation takes place inside or a festival activity such as Bingo is held inside. Masks are required of those serving and partaking of the food at an indoor location (e.g. inside the parish hall) during a parish festival.

Planning for an outdoor festival, dance, etc. should take into account the possibility of rain. If tents are used in order to mitigate the impact of inclement weather and a large crowd congregates under a tent, it is possible that it this arrangement may be construed as “indoors” and thus making the use of Masks necessary.

On April 27, 2021, the PA Department of Health issued an [update](#) that should be taken into account in planning parish activities.

The Governor’s Office and the PA Department of Health have stated explicitly that the use of Masks/Face Coverings will remain in effect until 70% of Pennsylvania adults are fully vaccinated.

All parishes, schools, and related organizations in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown are to follow the state guidelines and directives. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic people have talked about being in this together. That care for everyone must continue in a proactive way.

Any questions concerning this update, especially as it relates to summer parish activities, should be referred to Fr. Alan Thomas, Vicar General, or to Bishop Mark.