

Health and Strength in Community XV

My siblings in Christ:

We've all been watching the late spring colors change ever since the State of California announced that CDC COVID-19 protocols would apply statewide beginning tomorrow – Tuesday, June 15.

As of this morning, four of our six Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles counties are in the yellow tier, denoting minimal risk. Riverside and San Bernardino are still orange, for moderate risk. The good news is that as of early last week, both had achieved yellow metrics. The trend is in the right direction – though they'll never make yellow, since by the time the two-week waiting period ends, the color scheme will be gone.

Nevertheless, I believe it is now prudent to say that all our missions and parishes may adopt the CDC guidelines tomorrow.

Under [CDC guidelines](#), fully vaccinated people can resume most of their ordinary activities, including virtually all those associated with worship, fellowship, meetings, teaching, and service at our churches. That means the vaccinated can stop wearing masks and social distancing.

But some folks in our churches have chosen not to be vaccinated. Young children can't be. We want everyone to know that the person next to them and their family in the pew is safe. **Accordingly, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech all adults in our diocese, if they cannot or choose not to be vaccinated, to follow scrupulously the CDC requirement for non-vaccinated people and continue to mask up and socially distance or, if you prefer, to worship remotely.**

You may have strong views about the vaccine or a medical reason you can't have it. But for everyone to feel safe in our churches, especially parents and those who still feel at risk despite being vaccinated, each must do their part, sometimes sacrificing their prerogatives for the sake of others, according to the model of Jesus Christ. So again, if you're not vaccinated, please wear your mask and socially distance in church. **If you are not comfortable with this CDC and diocesan requirement, as chief pastor of the diocese I ask you to write me confidentially at jtaylor@ladiocese.org so we can be in conversation.**

As we return from our exile time, some additional nuances:

- All who are vaccinated are welcome to sing in church. I ask choir leaders to insist that all choir members be vaccinated.
- For the time being, please centralize all food and beverage service during coffee hour and other events. All those serving should be vaccinated.
- If you are offering remote worship, please continue to do so for the sake of evangelism and those who can't come to church.

- Prayer books and hymnals may be restored to their accustomed places.
- Keep washing your hands frequently and using hand sanitizer. These are good practices all the time. But you can stop most extraordinary sanitation measures adopted at church during the pandemic.
- For the vaccinated, handshakes and hugs are welcomed but by no means required. Since they require a dance step, elbow bumps are fun.
- Since children under age 12 cannot yet be vaccinated, try to avoid all direct physical contact with young children; elbow bumps are fine, but no hugs or handshakes. Parents should minimize their unvaccinated children's social time at church, such as playtime during coffee hour. Sunday School or other gatherings of children should continue to be held only in large, well-ventilated spaces or (preferably) outside, using social distancing and masks. Children's choirs may not resume yet.
- All those celebrating and serving Holy Communion should be vaccinated. The Presiding Bishop asks that we continue to serve communion in one kind only as he and his colleagues discern the best way to honor our Anglican heritage of the common cup in the shadow of pandemic.
- For churches hosting third-party events, from 12-step groups to receptions and dinners, the same principles apply: Business as usual for the vaccinated, masks and social distancing (or staying home) for the non-vaccinated, and centralized food and beverage service by vaccinated preparers and servers.

My fellow pilgrims, during these 15 months, you have been magnificent, giving up what you most love about church, sacrificing for the glory of God and the sake of family, friend, and stranger, making every day an Easter Day by helping keep tombs empty. I give thanks for you and for the vaccine, which is enabling our return from exile sooner than many at first expected.

If you are vaccinated, please say so evangelically, and pray that vaccination rates pick up. Also pray for the billions around the world who are still at risk and for leaders of rich nations, especially ours, who have the capacity to vaccinate the world if they so choose.

Yours in Christ's love,

The Rt. Rev. John Harvey Taylor
VII Bishop of Los Angeles