

# **New Bedford will implement state COVID-19 guidelines at houses of worship**

New Bedford will implement the statewide COVID-19 guidelines for houses of worship in the city, the Health Department announced to faith leaders this week.

New Bedford had implemented an additional cap, 40% or 100 people, whichever was lower, in the spring. Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court decided against certain capacity restrictions in Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, New York v. Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York.

In November, Governor Baker issued COVID-19 Order No. 54, Further Regulating Gatherings in the Commonwealth, which requires religious gatherings to follow COVID-19 safety rules and capacity limitations.

The following is an excerpt summarizing the state's occupancy guidelines:

For indoor services, places of worship must monitor member entries and exits and limit occupancy at all times to the greater of the following:

50% of the building's maximum permitted occupancy as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder

Buildings for which no permitted occupancy limitation is on record may allow 10 persons (including staff) per 1,000 square feet of accessible space

In any case, no enclosed space (e.g. a single room, basement) within the building may exceed occupancy of 10 persons per 1,000 square feet

All occupancy counts and calculations shall include attendees, staff, and other workers

Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart

Under Massachusetts statewide COVID-19 protocols, all attendees of any indoor gathering must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID Order No. 31 and guidance of the state Department of Public Health while inside, and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask due to a medical or disabling condition.