

Bishop Vetter's Reponse to Governor Bullock's Mask Directive

Bishop Vetter has affirmed that effective immediately, masks or face coverings must be worn in parish related indoor spaces open to the public in keeping with the directives of the State of Montana. This is a public health issue, we are seeking to ensure the safety and health of everyone.

So, when our spaces—churches, offices, schools—are open to the public, masks or face coverings must be worn by all ages 5 and older. It also applies to outdoor gatherings of greater than 50, where social distancing cannot be maintained. Reminder: social events/gatherings, potlucks, coffee/donuts are not allowed at this time.

There are a couple of exceptions contained in the state directive that need to be noted:

- 1) “persons giving a speech or engaging in an artistic, cultural, musical, or theatrical performance for an audience, provided the audience is separated by at least six feet of distance.”
- 2) “Only those employees, volunteers, contractors in public-facing work spaces are required to wear face coverings as specified.”
- 3) This also only applies in counties where there are 4 or more active cases of COVID-19 — but even then, everyone is strongly encouraged to wear face coverings. (Here is the link from the State of Montana that shows active cases:

<https://montana.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=7c34f3412536439491adcc2103421d4b>

For our parishes, a priest could remove his mask while proclaiming the Gospel and for the homily — provided there is more than 6 feet distance to anyone. This applies while at the altar too, although it is advisable to keep the hosts covered if a face covering is not used. The priest and communion ministers are to wear masks/face coverings while distributing communion. If there is physical contact between the minister and communicant, hand sanitation must occur immediately.

In the parish offices, masks or face coverings should be used by everyone entering or leaving the building, while in hallways, bathrooms, common areas. If someone is working alone at their desk, the face covering can be removed.

We recognize that this is difficult. We are seeking the safety and protection of all.

We encourage parishes to have extra masks available for those who forget to bring one. It is also advisable to post signs on all points of public access that state, “A mask or face covering is required for everyone age five and older.”