

Considerations for In-Person Meetings

This document exists to provide information for groups to **consider** as they move toward holding in-person meetings again.

We cannot provide a comprehensive source of all pertinent information and regulations. Each group is responsible for understanding the full scope of the state and county health directives.

NOTE: At this time, the health guidance from Santa Clara County states that “Despite recent progress, Santa Clara County continues to experience significant rates of COVID-19 transmission, and the danger COVID-19 poses to our community remains substantial.” County residents are still encouraged to stay home as much as possible to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Our decisions to reopen meetings should be made carefully and deliberately. If your group is comfortable with virtual meetings in the short term, you are urged to continue them. People at higher risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 are strongly urged to not attend any in-person meetings.

It is recommended that a group hold a group conscience to determine how it wants to proceed, in order to open meetings in a safe and spiritually sound way. We offer you the [Group Inventory for the COVID-19 Era](#).

This “Considerations for In-Person Meetings” document may be updated as conditions change, so please bookmark it and check back as the situation changes.

As your group implements plans, procedures, updated text for meeting scripts, etc., we request that you share the documentation and information with us so that we might offer the benefit of your experience to other groups. Email: aasjvsc@gmail.com.

The suggestions that follow have been compiled with input from other A.A. intergroups and central offices across the country. Our effort here is to present some “best practices” to protect A.A. members and A.A. as a whole as we go forward together.

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What's Allowed Right Now?

A.A. meetings qualify as “gatherings”, as defined by the State of California and Santa Clara County. The most up-to-date information on guidance for “gatherings” can be found in the following documents (check this page again later for updates):

- [California Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#)
- [Beyond the Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#)
- [Blueprint Activities and Business Tiers Chart](#)
- [Santa Clara County Public Health Order Frequently Asked Questions - Novel Coronavirus](#)
- [State of California Department of Public Health Guidance for the Prevention of Covid-19 Transmission for Gatherings, Updated November 13, 2020](#)
- [Fact Sheet: State of California Department of Public Health Guidance for the Prevention of Covid-19 Transmission for Gatherings](#)

(Note that where there is a difference between the county and the state public health orders, the more restrictive order must be followed.)

If your group wishes to begin planning to reopen, we suggest you refer to the documents listed above for the most up-to-date requirements and restrictions. The [Public Health Resources](#) page contains links to the complete state and county public health orders, and other useful information. Note that when there is a discrepancy between county and state orders, the more restrictive order applies. In addition, the hosting facility for your meeting may also have its own procedures and restrictions.

Our suggestions for how your group might wish to implement public health regulations are presented below under [Tackling Practical Issues](#).

Central Office will list meetings on the aasanjose.org website, in the printed meeting guide, and in the Meeting Guide “app” for informational purposes only and takes no position and makes no representations nor guarantees that these meetings comply with current federal, state, or local laws as they apply to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Confirm compliance at each location you attend and make your own decisions.

NOTE: The insurance policies many groups have obtained through the Santa Clara Intergroup Central Office do **not** cover COVID-19. At this time, it appears that individual A.A. groups themselves must be prepared to handle liability for any claims that arise as a result of COVID-19 or lack of compliance with standing public health guidelines. Keep in mind that decisions your group makes and actions your group takes may be the only exposure a host facility or non-members have to A.A.

Tackling Practical Issues

Here we focus on how your group might address the requirements in the Santa Clara county and State of California health directives that apply to A.A. meetings. This information is not exhaustive, and your group is responsible for understanding and implementing the full scope of current state and county orders.

How your group chooses to handle the “musts” dictated by government health regulations is a matter for your group conscience to decide. While there are no “musts” in the A.A. program, we do need to abide by the laws that govern our larger community. Fortunately, our program of recovery has taught us how to be responsible citizens, both inside and outside the rooms of A.A. Tradition One tells us *“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”* Tradition Four states, *“Each group is autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole”*, which cautions us to be mindful of how our actions may impact the wider A.A. community.

Your Meeting Facility

It is recommended to begin a dialog with your meeting facility as soon as you begin to consider meeting again, to help you with an informed group conscience. Regardless of whether a meeting is held indoors or outdoors, you will need permission and cooperation from the associated facility.

Host facilities may require meetings to sign a liability waiver stating that the facility will not be held liable for any COVID-19-related illness. Some host facilities may not be ready to welcome groups back to their property or may have their own guidelines that are more restrictive than the state or county regulations. Ask the facility if they have prepared a site-specific protection plan.

Be aware that if your meeting is not in compliance with local public health regulations, the host facility may suffer adverse consequences, such as losing their business license.

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The Meeting Script Reflects the Current Situation

Each meeting will need to adapt its procedures for meetings held in the COVID-19 era. The meeting script is a logical place to inform meeting members about how meetings will be conducted, and the expectations for meeting participants.

We suggest that you update your meeting script to include some version of the information in this sample script, which will help alert participants to their responsibilities within the meeting (Alternatively, your meeting may wish to create a poster or handout with this information, and have the meeting script ask participants to become familiar with it):

“We ask your cooperation in observing current health regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The law of the land does not stop at the door of A.A. Tradition 1 tells us “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.” Our 4th Tradition asks us to refrain from actions that affect other groups or A.A. as a whole, including our reputation and good name in the community. If you feel that you cannot abide by the following conditions, we respectfully ask you to attend a different meeting:”

The “conditions” mentioned in the script or handout might include the following:

- “As a member of this group, we ask that you
 - go home if you feel unwell
 - to refrain from attending the meeting if you have tested positive for the virus
 - stay 6 or more feet apart
 - wear a mask when not eating or drinking
 - observe the meeting size limit
 - provide your name and contact details, in compliance with county health orders”
- “This meeting is legally required to assist the county with contact tracing if someone who attended the meeting tests positive for COVID-19.”
- “If you test positive for COVID-19, you will need to work with the County Public Health Department to trace your contacts. You can get in touch with the meeting Secretary or the Contact Tracing Coordinator(*), who will ensure that the appropriate contact information is forwarded to the health department. Our meeting will be described simply as a “community meeting”, and your participation in A.A. will not be mentioned. The health department will use this information only for public health purposes and is legally bound to not reveal the name of an infected person or their contacts due to HIPAA regulations.”
- “If you cannot agree to these conditions, our Attendance Monitor(*) can provide you with details on where to attend other meetings.”

Other text that you may wish to include in your script or handout might include the following:

- “Please take your temperature before coming to the meeting.”
- “Please do not hold hands at the end of the meeting. Also, please refrain from singing.”
- “Please bring your own books for book study meetings.” It may be useful to mention that an electronic copy of all A.A. literature is available online at aa.org.

(*) The responsibilities implied by the “Contract Tracing Coordinator” and “Attendance Monitor” service positions mentioned in the sample script are described below under “New Opportunities for Service”. Each group is free to distribute these service responsibilities among its members as it sees fit.

New Opportunities for Service

The current situation presents many challenges which we can meet by establishing new or modified service position(s) to handle the many public health requirements. The following new/updated service roles are suggested (and can be distributed among a meeting’s trusted servants as your group conscience deems appropriate):

NOTE: For suggestions on service positions specific to hybrid meetings, go to [Hybrid Online/In-Person Meetings](#).

The *Public Health Host* can ensure that other trusted servants are available at the meeting to carry out the necessary public health directives for social distancing, mask wearing, keeping track of attendance, enforcing the room capacity limit, taking contact details for contact tracing, sanitizing the meeting space/equipment and the restrooms (if any), and so on. The Public Health Host can also recruit a couple of the meeting’s other trusted servants to make themselves available as “spiritual bouncers”, to take non-compliant members aside, away from the meeting, to ask them to attend a different meeting. The Public Health Host may find it helpful to use the [Health Measures Checklist](#). (The Checklist may be updated as conditions change.)

The *Health Greeter* can ensure that all participants are asked appropriate “are you feeling well” questions, and direct people away from the in-person meeting and toward online meetings if they show signs of illness. The Health Greeter may choose to ask each attendee to take their own temperature at home before attending the next meeting. The Health Greeter may also wish to ask these COVID-19 health screening questions, which are also included on the [Health Measures Checklist](#).

- Do you have a fever, or have you had a fever within the last 72 hours?
- Do you have any of the following symptoms:
 - Chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
- Have you been in direct contact with a person who has, or is under examination or observation for having COVID-19 and are you showing any signs of symptoms (as noted above)?

The *Mask Monitor* can remind meeting participants to wear a mask except when eating or drinking. The Mask Monitor could also offer a mask to an attendee who does not have one.

The *Attendance Monitor* can ensure that no more than the maximum permitted number of people attend the meeting in total, including people who leave early or arrive late. If more people arrive, the Attendance Monitor could offer a packet of phone numbers, virtual meeting info, and other resources in a plastic baggie to take home with them.

The *Social Distancing Monitor* can remind meeting participants to remain 6 or more feet apart at all times. If lines are likely to form (for example, to use a restroom), the Social Distancing Monitor can mark off intervals of 6 feet (or more) with tape to establish where individuals should stand to maintain adequate social distancing.

The *Contact Tracing Coordinator* (“CTC”) can compile a list of the first names and contact details for all meeting participants and remain in close touch with the meeting secretarie(s). To avoid multiple people having physical contact with the attendee list, the CTC might wish to work, in part, from a copy of the existing phone list for the group, by highlighting or placing a checkmark next to the names of that day’s participants and could append other participants’ details to the list. The CTC can then date the list and save it for 30 days before disposing of it if it is not needed. If called upon for contact tracing purposes, the CTC can provide the list of meeting participants to the health department, with the group simply described as a “community organization”. (If the group phone list is used, the CTC can simply black out the names of people on the list who were not at the meeting.) It is not necessary to identify meeting participants as A.A. members. The health department will use this information only for public health purposes and is legally bound to not reveal names due to HIPAA regulations.

The *Phone List Coordinator* can create a phone and email list for the group. Having a phone list is a benefit to members in general, and can help the CTC, too. At each meeting, the Phone List Coordinator can work with the CTC to add any new people to the phone list if they wish to be added when they provide their contact details to the CTC.

The *Meeting Space Sanitizer* can be responsible for sanitizing any chairs, tables, microphones, and podiums used at the meeting before **and** after each use. Of course, a group may choose to require participants to bring their own seating, and refrain from using tables, microphones, etc.

The *Restroom Sanitizer* can be responsible for sanitizing the restroom(s), if your hosting facility provides access to them, before **and** after the meeting, including door handles, light switches, etc.

The *Coffee Coordinator* can serve any food or drinks, if current regulations permit them and your group chooses to allow them. To prevent unnecessary contact, people should not serve themselves from communal containers. Therefore, if single-serve disposable containers (for example, individual bottles of water, single serving bags of chips or cookies) are not possible, food and drinks can be served by a trusted servant who wears disposable gloves and a face covering, and who washes or sanitizes their hands often.

Other Considerations

To prevent unnecessary contact, any item that is normally passed from hand-to-hand, such as the donation basket for the 7th Tradition, can be placed in a stationary spot for people to place their donations, one at a time, while maintaining social distancing.

Similarly, to avoid sharing books and laminated readings (for example, *How it Works*, *The 12 Traditions*, *The Promises*), your group may wish to have disposable one-time-use copies of readings, and to ask that book study meeting participants bring their own books. Alternatively, you can remind meeting participants that all A.A. literature is available online at aa.org.

If your group gives away donated books or copies of Grapevine / La Viña, consider having at least a 72-hour quarantine period for pre-owned materials.

If your group does not already accept electronic donations, consider adding a “digital basket” capability in order to protect your group treasurer from needing to handle cash.

If your group gives away chips, consider how to do a contact-free presentation. The chip person might sanitize a chip and place it in a plastic bag or envelope on a table for the recipient to pick up.

Consider providing sterile disposable gloves to the meeting's trusted servants, such as the treasurer who handles cash, the secretary who handles meeting materials, the chip person, the coffee server, the meeting space and restroom sanitizers, and so on.

Consider providing cleaning/sanitizing supplies to the trusted servants who sanitize the meeting space and restrooms. (Soap for hand washing and/or hand sanitizer are not optional; they are required.)

Discuss how the group will handle someone who does not wish to comply with health directives, but who resists leaving the meeting. Consider asking them to step outside the meeting space with two designated group members to talk, who can then give them a list of phone numbers and resources for other meetings.

Consider setting up a group email address and electing an Intergroup Representative if your group does not already have one, so that Central Office has a reliable way to give you timely updates about news and upcoming events in the Santa Clara county AA fellowship as a whole.

When your meeting is ready to (re)open, fill out the [New/Updated Meeting Form](#), which will update the meeting listing in all three places where meetings are listed: in the printed meeting guide, on the aasanjose.org website, and in the Meeting Guide "app".

NOTE: At this time, all meeting details must be entered in the form-even if the only change to a meeting is that it has reopened. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact aasjvsc@gmail.com, and include "New meeting form" in the subject line so that your questions can be answered as quickly as possible.