



# MIKE DEWINE

## GOVERNOR OF OHIO

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August 4, 2020

Dear Faith Leader,

We have received requests from a number of people in the faith community recently to provide guidance on keeping worshipers safe, as we battle the coronavirus. The virus, as you know, is very much with us, and in fact, has spread farther than it has at any time in the past.

We have been very careful throughout this pandemic to exempt religious services from any regulations (The only exception to this is our recent mask order.). However, we are learning from specific examples of where the virus is spreading that it does include houses of worship. Since the pandemic began, we have spoken regularly with local health department officials who are mapping the spread of the illness. In recent months, they have shared examples of outbreaks related to faith-based communities in Ohio that include:

- A church bus trip in late June led to eight cases of COVID-19;
- After attending a church service, where worshipers were not social distancing, 16 people tested positive for the virus;
- In late July, another faith-based community had five cases that spread to three counties;
- And, in June, a person with COVID-19 attended a church service that led to 91 additional people contracting the virus by July 4<sup>th</sup> (see enclosure).

As you know, doctors and public health experts continue to learn more about the virus and how it spreads, and so I want to share with you our most recent health information on the virus.

1. The virus spreads much more rapidly indoors than it does outdoors. A recent study in Japan <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.02.28.20029272v2> found that being INSIDE is 19 more times as dangerous as being with the same people OUTSIDE!

2. Social distancing AND mask wearing provide the most protection. When everyone is wearing a mask -- and social distancing -- the protection is the greatest.

3. Sadly, great spread can come when people are singing or speaking loudly.

4. Good ventilation is important. If an event must take place inside, it is important that the room be ventilated well. Adjusting furnaces or air conditioning so that large amounts of outside air are constantly being brought into the building is very important.

5. Avoid touching common surfaces, and sanitizing these surfaces is very important.

Please share this vital information with your network. Our institutions of faiths are at the core of our great state and country. Thank you for all you do to serve God and to serve His people.

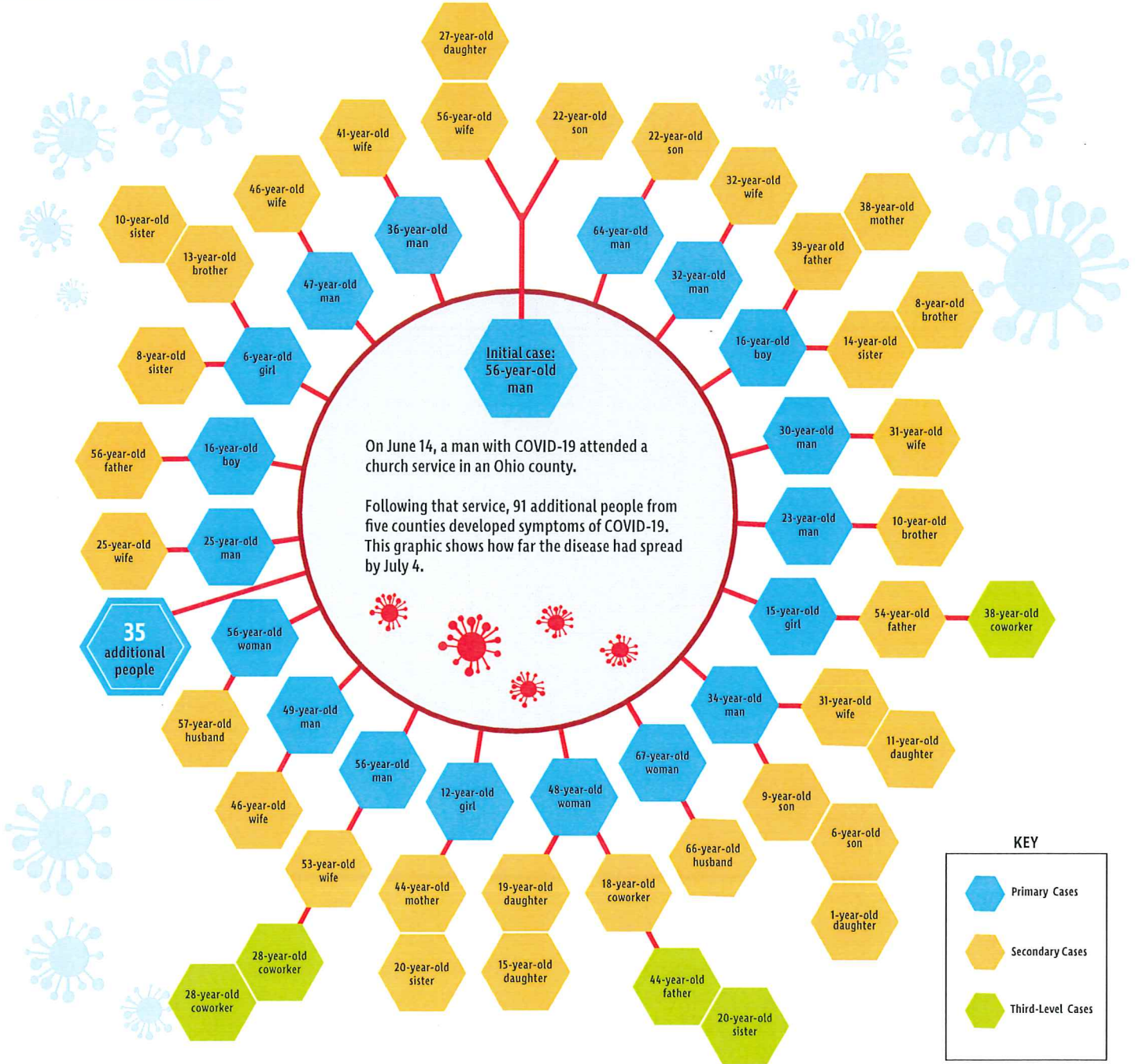
All my best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike DeWine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike DeWine  
Governor

P.S. Enclosed is an example that a local health department shared with us about how widely the virus spread recently at a church in Ohio, as well as additional guidance on how to best prevent spread and keep worshipers safe. Again, please share this important information with others.

# COVID-19 SPREAD: CASE STUDY





**MIKE DEWINE**  
GOVERNOR OF OHIO

**Ohio**

Department  
of Health

#IN THIS TOGETHER  
**Ohio**

#RESPONSIBLE  
RESTART

**Ohio**



# Responsible RestartOhio

## Religious Services

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, religious services have been exempted from any mandates because of First Amendment freedoms. However, many religious organizations stopped in-building services. Now that in-building services are resuming, here are some recommendations to help keep congregants safe.**

### Recommended Best Practices

- Indoor activity is inherently more dangerous than outdoor activities because of the recirculating of the air inside. The more outside air incorporated, the better.
- Suggest congregants sit with their families and have each family sitting at least six feet from other people is essential. Masks worn by members of your congregations is a great addition to the social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The two used together add a lot of protection.
- Eliminate as much as possible the touching of common surfaces, such as collection baskets and other prayer materials.
- Continue to offer vulnerable members of your community alternative methods of attending a service. Those over 65 and those with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, immune compromised conditions, severe obesity (body mass index of 40 or higher), chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, or liver disease are at higher risk from COVID-19.