



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
— OF FRIENDS —
QUAKERS

COVID Safety Plan and Protocols Annual Sessions 2023

Introduction

This COVID Safety Plan and Protocols for NEYM Annual Sessions 2023 has been developed in consultation with many concerned parties, based on a range of policies used in similar contexts, including multiple COVID safety policies used successfully for NEYM-sponsored in-person events during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been approved by the Yearly Meeting Secretary. It will serve to offer the authoritative framework for NEYM implementation and decision-making related to COVID safety before, during and after Annual Sessions 2023.

Guidance, Input, and Consultation

This policy was developed using the baselines of the State of Vermont public health guidance, the policies and requirements of Castleton University, and the current guidance of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Quakers who are medical professionals with experience in COVID care for both adults and children have also been consulted, as have people responsible for COVID safety for other yearly meetings and Quaker organizations.

Process for Revision

Consistent with the approved policy of the Yearly Meeting, the Yearly Meeting Secretary is charged with developing, approving, and directing implementation of policies and protocols involving safety, security, liability, and pastoral care at Annual Sessions, and for approving COVID safety plans for all Yearly Meeting-sponsored events held with in-person components during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of the uncertainty involved in the ongoing public health situation in our wider region and conditions and guidance in Vermont, and in consultation as needed, the Yearly Meeting Secretary may determine that there is a need to make changes to this policy before or during Sessions. In these cases, changes will be shared as quickly and widely as possible with registered Sessions participants, and will be updated in the official policy, with an updated approval date.

Questions about this policy? Concerns?

We will continue to review, update, and adjust these plans as we get closer to Sessions. We want Friends' time together at Annual Sessions 2023 to be a healthy and positive experience for you and all who participate.

Friends serving to host Annual Sessions on behalf of the Yearly Meeting are grateful in advance for your support, patience, and cooperation as we seek to care for the whole community gathered for Sessions, and to be mindful of our impact on the people and communities hosting us, and in which we make our homes.

If you have questions or concerns about any provisions in this policy, please contact health@neym.org.

Baseline Requirements

From the State of Vermont/Castleton University

Masking is not required indoors by the State, and NEYM will not be requiring masking indoors for NEYM Sessions (*except as described below*). All attenders are required to be up to date on vaccinations for COVID-19, with a negative antigen test required prior to arrival/participation in activities on campus. Re-testing is not required for asymptomatic attenders, since Sessions participants are staying less than a week.

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

“Up to date” means all eligible people (aged 6+) should be at least two weeks out from one dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine, or consistent with their physician’s guidance.

The CDC uses a [Community Spread Tracking](#) tool that will be used as a reference for NEYM in implementing this plan. Other information and guidelines regarding COVID-19 are available [here](#).

Yearly Meeting Requirements, Prevention, and Response

1. Vaccination

All in-person participants at Annual Sessions must be “up to date,” according to CDC guidance, unless ineligible for vaccination for medical reasons (age or otherwise). However, NEYM will not require that participants show proof of vaccination, or of a negative antigen test, unless the participant is symptomatic, or at the request of the COVID Safety Coordinator.

2. Consent to COVID Safety Protocols

- a. All Sessions registrants will be required to affirm that they understand and commit to abide by all COVID safety protocols and expectations.
- b. Reminder of Sessions protocols and expectations will be sent to all in-person registrants 72 hours before Sessions begins.

3. Testing

- a. A negative antigen or negative PCR test (self-facilitated or -administered) is required to attend Sessions for all eligible attenders, regardless of vaccination status.
- b. All participants are required to test (antigen) prior to traveling to Sessions, and to affirm that they have tested negative within 24 hours of arriving at Sessions.
- c. Sessions attenders will be encouraged to bring their own antigen test kits; a limited number of additional tests will be available on site as well.
- d. Anyone testing positive at Sessions will not be able to participate, and will need to depart from Sessions as soon as possible.

4. Masking

- a. For adults, high-filtration (KN95 or N95) face coverings covering both the nose and mouth will be required in the auditorium of the Fine Arts Center (FAC).
- b. In the FAC auditorium, presenters, speakers, and facilitators may remove their masks while speaking.
- c. Masking is not required in most public indoor spaces, though everyone is encouraged to mask whenever it would increase their sense of safety and comfort.
- d. While all participants will be asked to bring their own masks, NEYM will have a limited quantity of additional high-filtration masks available on site.
- e. **Youth programs, including childcare, may implement further protocols in addition to the general protocols described here.**

5. Close Contacts/Contact Tracing

- a. When someone tests positive during Sessions:
 - i. The person will need to leave Sessions, and will be supported to make these arrangements as soon as possible.
 - ii. If necessary, they may quarantine short-term in the designated space on campus until appropriate travel arrangements can be made.
 - iii. NEYM will notify the Castleton public health contact.
 - iv. The COVID Safety Coordinator will work with the person who has tested positive to identify their recent close contacts. As much as possible, Friends with whom they have had significant contact (e.g., home group, youth

program, dorm suitemates) will be notified by COVID Safety Coordinator, with support from staff as needed.

- b. Contact tracing expectations will be communicated by email at the end of Sessions, for the week after Sessions:
 - i. Anyone with COVID symptoms within 5 days after the event will get a test and communicate positive results to COVID Safety Coordinator.
 - ii. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, body aches, sore throat, shortness of breath.
- c. If there is a positive test after Sessions, NEYM will communicate this to the public health contact at Castleton University, and to Sessions attenders, consistent with “10. Communications,” below.

6. Air Flow

- a. Castleton has replaced/upgraded filtration systems in several places, including the auditorium in the Fine Arts Center.
- b. Friends are welcome to bring personal air purifiers or fans, if desired.
- c. We encourage Friends to open windows and doors in rooms, while mindful of alarm systems on campus building entrances/exits.
- d. We encourage Friends to spend as much of Sessions as possible outside, including in several tents and shade structures on campus.

7. Physical Distancing

- a. Consent for physical contact and proximity should always be requested before initiating contact with another person.
- b. Some people may wish to offer or receive hugs or handshakes; some may wish to avoid such physical contact, even when otherwise in proximity. Care should be taken to respect a variety of comfort levels with physical contact, even outside.
- c. Those leading programs involving physical contact will consider spacing requirements for these activities, with these protocols as a baseline.
- d. We encourage spacing in the dining hall and under tents or lawn outside the dining hall, to allow for social distancing.
- e. Open windows and doors during meals, if possible, to increase airflow.

8. Food Service Precautions

- a. Following Castleton food service guidelines
- b. Encouraging handwashing and regular sanitizing

9. Cleaning

- a. Bathrooms and shared spaces and surfaces will be cleaned by Castleton staff, consistent with Castleton protocols
- b. All participants will dispose of masks or other medical waste appropriately in waste receptacles, consistent with Castleton protocols
 - i. Avoid overloading trash cans or masks being discarded loose on campus; discard in bins with active collection

10. Communications

- a. COVID Safety expectations will be shared with all registrants.
- b. Any medical records will be maintained separately from other registration information, using a secondary system with access as needed only, consistent with NEYM data privacy policies.
- c. **72 hours before Sessions**, all registrants will be sent an email reminding them of the commitments they have made regarding COVID safety, including:
 - i. testing before departure
 - ii. masking in the Fine Arts Center auditorium
 - iii. not coming to Sessions with symptoms
 - iv. not coming after known close contact exposure in a timeframe requiring quarantine (according to CDC guidance)
- d. **During Sessions**, participants agree to notify the COVID Safety Coordinator at health@neym.org or using the posted phone number, and take an antigen test if experiencing COVID symptoms.
- e. **At the end of Sessions, in-person participants will be encouraged to test the following week, and to report any positive tests to health@neym.org.**
- f. **If at least one unexpected positive test is reported within five days post-Sessions**, a further email will be sent to all who attended in person, advising all participants that they may have been close contacts and to consider taking appropriate steps in their own home context, consistent with CDC guidelines and their vaccination and health status.

Measures to help implement this plan

The Yearly Meeting will:

1. Appoint a COVID Safety Coordinator (CSC) on Sessions staff to:
 - a. Assist and advise the Yearly Meeting Secretary and relevant parties (including morning meeting) to make decisions about safety pre-Sessions and during Sessions

- b. Help explain rules, implement practices, keep track of COVID details so that other staff and leadership can focus on their responsibilities during Sessions
 - c. Reflect on how we did with safety post-Sessions, assess for next Sessions and other events going forward
 - d. See [role description](#) for further detail
2. Publicize COVID Safety Coordinator contact as part of registration materials on arrival
 3. Publicize a list of COVID symptoms, and clarify what people with any COVID-related symptoms should do
 4. **Establish a backup plan/backup coordination** in case the COVID Safety Coordinator gets sick or has a COVID contact before Sessions
 5. Ensure antigen tests, high filtration masks, and hand sanitizer are on hand at Sessions
 6. Provide clear and timely communication with participants about risks, protocols, and known exposures before, during, and after Sessions
 7. Encourage participants to **bring appropriate outdoor gear** so they can comfortably endure time spent outdoors, including in cold and wet conditions if needed
 8. Youth staff, with Yearly Meeting Secretary approval, will develop and enact additional protocols and expectations applying to youth program participants and staff
 9. Prepare a limited-capacity **designated quarantine/isolation space** that can be reserved and used as needed for short-term isolation/quarantine only, until people are able to depart safely and with care

What happens if ...

1. Registered participants have COVID symptoms the week prior to Sessions:
 - a. In order to attend Sessions, a person must be symptom-free, and at least 48 hours fever-free by the start of Sessions, and have a negative antigen test.
2. Someone starts experiencing COVID-19 symptoms during Sessions:
 - a. Isolate/quarantine as soon as possible.
 - b. Give rapid test on site immediately.
 - i. If test is negative, they may remain on campus, as long as they mask and continue to test negative daily while symptoms persist.
 - ii. If test is positive, the person testing positive will leave Sessions. The COVID Safety Coordinator will interview the person about close contacts and will notify close contacts as soon as possible, so that they can test. The Coordinator or a designee will inquire if they would like to request a refund of any part of Sessions fees paid, acknowledging costs already incurred by NEYM.
 - iii. As notified, the COVID Safety Coordinator will track those needing a daily test, for follow-up or support if needed.

3. During Sessions, someone learns they have had a COVID-19 exposure of a close contact prior to arrival:
 - a. If CDC guidelines would require quarantine, the close contact will need to leave Sessions.
 - b. If CDC guidelines would not require quarantine, and the person has a consistent daily negative test result, they may continue to attend Sessions, but must test daily.

Reflection questions for gray areas and unexpected and time-sensitive decisions:

- Have I/we held this decision in prayer, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
- Would I/we be able to explain my/our decision-making to participants, their families, and the wider communities that might be affected?
- How might this decision affect the individual, the whole group, and the wider communities of which we are a part?
- What precedent does this decision set?
- Have I/we consulted, as able, with those with the most relevant knowledge or context about how this decision might unfold?
- Have I/we weighed the foreseeable trade-offs, to the extent I'm able given other constraints and present knowledge?
- Who needs to approve this decision? Who needs to be notified?

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