

GUIDANCE FOR CHURCHES ON NC'S FACE COVERING MANDATE

N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper announced on Wednesday, June 24, that face coverings must be worn in public places in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. Cooper also announced that North Carolina will remain in the “Safer at Home Phase 2” until Friday, July 17.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina’s (BSCNC) legal counsel has provided the [following statement](#) regarding how [Executive Order 147](#) applies to churches and worship services.

STATEMENT

Executive Order 147 issued June 24, 2020 does not impose a requirement that individuals attending a worship service must wear a face covering. Section 3.5.B. of Executive Order 147 states:

“People are required to wear Face Coverings in the following settings, whether they are inside or outside, unless an exception applies....” (emphasis added). The Executive Order 147 then has 10 paragraphs with specific categories of businesses and government where wearing face coverings are required. None of these paragraphs mention churches or worship services.

Executive Order 147 amends [Executive Order 141](#) in certain respects. Nothing in Executive Order 147 amended Section 4 of Executive Order 141 which exempts worship services from certain requirements as follows:

Section 4. Exemptions from This Executive Order. Worship, religious, and spiritual gatherings, funeral ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, and other activities constituting the exercise of First Amendment rights are exempt from all the requirements of this Executive Order and Executive Order Nos. 121 and 138, notwithstanding any other provision of this Executive Order or of Executive Order Nos. 121 and 138. The undersigned strongly urges that entities and individuals engaging in these exempted activities follow the Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission, avoid exceeding Emergency Maximum Occupancy in the places where they meet, and avoid holding Mass Gatherings.

The Governor’s Office and other state agencies have issued FAQs to help explain the Executive Orders from time to time. The [FAQs for Executive Order 147](#) provides on page 2:

Does this Order require North Carolinians to wear face coverings?

Yes. People are now required to wear face coverings in public spaces, whether inside or outside, where physical distancing of six feet is not possible. This includes but is not limited to:

Then the FAQ goes through the same 10 paragraphs that are in the Executive Order. The statement in the FAQs is broader than the language in the order. When there is a conflict, the order controls.

This explanation addresses the legal right to not wear a face covering; it does not address the wisdom of not wearing a face covering and increased risk of increasing spread of COVID-19.

FACE COVERING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCHES

NOTE: In addition to the above statement from BSCNC legal counsel, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services has provided the following recommendations related to face coverings on page 2 of its [“Interim Guidance for Places of Worship and Religious Services”](#) issued on May 22.

Cloth Face Coverings

It is strongly recommended that all staff and congregants wear a cloth face covering when they may be near (less than 6 feet from) other people. An FAQ about face coverings is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

- It is encouraged that places of worship provide cloth face coverings for staff and congregants. If provided, they must be single use or properly laundered using hot water and a high heat dryer between uses.*
- Please share guidance to employees on use, wearing, and removal of cloth face coverings, such as [CDC's guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks](#), [CDC's use of cloth face coverings](#), and [CDC's cloth face coverings FAQ's](#).*