(POL-HEALTH) Health and Pandemic Response Policy

General Board Approved: May 31, 2026

Revision of Health & Pandemic Response Policy Adoption Date: 06/30/2020

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish how 1st Free Will Baptist Church will respond to serious communicable disease concerns, public health emergencies, epidemics, pandemics, or similar health-related disruptions that may affect the life and ministry of the church.

This policy is intended to help the church respond with wisdom, care, consistency, and faithfulness while protecting the congregation, guests, ministry workers, vulnerable persons, and the testimony of the church.

2. General Principle

The church believes gathering for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry is central to the life of the church. Therefore, in-person gatherings should not be limited, postponed, or suspended lightly.

At the same time, the church recognizes its responsibility to love our neighbors, care for the vulnerable, act with wisdom, and respond appropriately to serious health concerns.

The goal of this policy is not fear, but faithful stewardship.

3. Scope

This policy may apply to, but is not limited to:

- Worship gatherings;
- Sunday School;
- Children's ministry;
- Youth ministry;
- Nursery;
- Wednesday evening gatherings;
- Small groups;
- Food service;
- Church events;
- Transportation;
- Facility use;
- Office operations;
- Outside groups using church property.

2026-05-31

4. Authority to Respond

When a serious health concern arises, the Lead Pastor, in consultation with available members of the General Board, may take temporary action to protect the congregation and maintain ministry.

When time permits, major decisions should be made in consultation with the General Board.

If immediate action is necessary before the General Board can meet, the Lead Pastor may act in consultation with available Deacons, Trustees, or other appropriate church officers. Any temporary action should be reported to the General Board as soon as practical.

5. Factors to Consider

The church's response may consider:

- The nature and severity of the illness;
- Known or suspected exposure connected to church gatherings;
- The number of affected individuals;
- Risk to children, elderly persons, medically vulnerable persons, or those with disabilities;
- Recommendations or requirements from local, state, or federal public health authorities;
- School, nursing home, hospital, or community outbreak conditions;
- Availability of volunteers and ministry workers;
- Ability to clean, disinfect, and operate safely;
- Legal requirements;
- Insurance guidance;
- The spiritual and practical needs of the congregation.

2026-05-31

6. Levels of Response

The church may use one or more of the following responses depending on the situation.

A. Level 1: Normal Operations with Awareness

a. The church continues normal ministry operations while encouraging ordinary health precautions.

b. Possible actions include:

i. Encouraging those who are sick to stay home;

ii. Making hand sanitizer or cleaning supplies available when possible;

iii. Increasing routine cleaning;

iv. Communicating basic health reminders;

v. Monitoring local conditions.

B. Level 2: Increased Precautions

a. The church continues meeting but adjusts certain practices to reduce risk.

b. Possible actions include:

i. Temporarily modifying greeting practices;

ii. Adjusting communion, offering, or food service procedures;

iii. Increasing cleaning and disinfecting;

iv. Encouraging additional spacing where practical;

v. Asking ministry workers with symptoms to refrain from serving temporarily;

vi. Temporarily modifying nursery, children's ministry, or youth ministry procedures;

vii. Communicating known non-confidential exposure concerns to affected persons.

C. Level 3: Limited Ministry Adjustments

a. The church may temporarily postpone, modify, or limit selected ministries or activities.

b. Possible actions include:

i. Postponing children's ministry, youth ministry, Sunday School, Wednesday gatherings, or small groups;

ii. Suspending food service;

iii. Moving selected meetings online;

iv. Limiting facility use by outside groups;

v. Postponing higher-risk events;

vi. Temporarily adjusting transportation practices;

vii. Deep cleaning or disinfecting affected areas.

2026-05-31

D. Level 4: Temporary Suspension of In-Person Gatherings

a. When conditions warrant, the church may temporarily suspend some or all in-person gatherings.

b. This step should be taken only when necessary due to significant health risk, public health directive, legal requirement, major local outbreak, or inability to operate safely.

c. When in-person gatherings are temporarily suspended because the church is providentially hindered by serious health conditions, the church should seek to provide worship, teaching, pastoral care, communication, and ministry through available means, including online gatherings, phone calls, text communication, mailed resources, or other practical methods.

7. Exposure or Confirmed Illness Connected to Church Activities

When the church becomes aware of a confirmed or credible communicable disease exposure connected to a church gathering or activity, the General Board may:

- Communicate with those reasonably believed to have been affected;
- Notify the congregation when appropriate while protecting personal privacy;
- Temporarily postpone affected ministries or gatherings;
- Clean or disinfect affected areas according to current public health guidance;
- Consult local health authorities if needed;
- Resume normal activity when leadership determines it is wise and appropriate.

The church will seek to communicate promptly, usually within 24 hours of receiving reliable information, when there is a credible exposure concern connected to church ministry.

8. Privacy

The church will seek to protect personal health information and avoid unnecessary disclosure of names or medical details.

Health-related communication should provide enough information for reasonable care and awareness without gossip, speculation, or unnecessary identification of individuals.

9. Cleaning and Disinfecting

When illness exposure or outbreak concerns arise, the church may increase cleaning and disinfecting of affected areas.

Cleaning procedures should follow current public health recommendations and be appropriate to the nature of the illness, the affected space, and the level of risk.

2026-05-31

10. Food Service

Food service may be modified, limited, or temporarily suspended during periods of increased health concern.

Possible adjustments include:

- Suspending shared meals;
- Using served portions instead of self-service;
- Increasing hand hygiene expectations;
- Limiting food preparation to approved workers;
- Postponing food-related events.

11. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Because children, youth, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and medically vulnerable persons may require additional care, the General Board may temporarily modify or suspend ministries serving these groups when needed.

Decisions should consider both health risk and the spiritual, relational, and practical needs of families and vulnerable persons.

12. Communication

During a significant health concern, the church should communicate clearly and promptly through normal church communication channels, which may include text message, phone calls, email, social media, website updates, printed notices, or announcements.

Communication should include:

- What is changing;
- Why the change is being made;
- How long the change is expected to last, if known;
- What ministry options remain available;
- When the next update should be expected.

13. Review and Return to Normal Operations

Temporary restrictions or adjustments should be reviewed regularly.

The church may return to normal operations when leadership determines that conditions have improved, required restrictions have expired, exposure concerns have passed, or the church can operate safely and responsibly.

A fixed time period, such as two weeks, may be used when appropriate but is not required in every situation.

14. Legal and Public Health Compliance

The church intends to comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and lawful public health orders.

When public health recommendations are advisory rather than legally required, the General Board shall consider them carefully while also considering the church's biblical responsibilities, ministry needs, and local circumstances.

2026-05-31

15. Final Statement

The church's response to a pandemic or serious health concern should be marked by faith, wisdom, love, courage, and care for one another.

The church should neither act carelessly nor be ruled by fear. In all circumstances, the goal is to honor Christ, care for people, and continue the work of ministry as faithfully as possible.

16. Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically by the General Board and may be revised as needed.

2026-05-31