

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference
Covid Response Plan
January 2022

As we look ahead to Annual Conference, July 10-14, 2022, in Omaha, Nebraska, one of our top priorities is caring for the health and well-being of all Conferencegoers. In the highly politicized context of the ongoing pandemic, this has proven to be a challenging task. The Program and Arrangements Committee developed the following plan in consultation with epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen and physician and former Program and Arrangements Committee member Dr. Emily Shonk Edwards.

We have decided not to implement a vaccine requirement for all conference goers—a decision affirmed by Dr. Jacobsen and Dr. Shonk Edwards after consultation with district and denominational leadership. However, we **STRONGLY ENCOURAGE VACCINATIONS** for everyone who is eligible to receive initial doses and boosters. The currently-available vaccines have been proven to be very safe and very effective at reducing the risk of hospitalization and death. Vaccines will be required for key leadership and others who may need the flexibility of removing masks to be better understood while speaking. Vaccines will also be required for anyone volunteering with the early childhood program since our youngest Conferencegoers likely will not yet have access to vaccines.

Likewise, we also do not currently plan to require proof of a negative COVID test result upon arrival at Annual Conference or daily testing. The usefulness of a test is limited in relation to a multi-day event, since a test result only reflect one's status at the moment it was taken. However, we **ENCOURAGE COVID TESTS** for everyone within 24 hours prior to arriving at Annual Conference. (Please note that the guidance on timing for testing prior to arrival may change depending on real time circumstances this summer.) If you test positive—or if you have had a known exposure to someone who has tested positive to COVID-19—please, please, please stay home. We will refund your registration fee.

So, what will we be doing to protect your health and safety? We have developed a four-tiered response plan. The level of our response will be determined prior to Annual Conference based on two factors: the nationwide transmission rate as reported by the CDC using their county-by-county COVID tracker and guidance from local health officials in Omaha. The plan level for Annual Conference will not be any lower than the level of community transmission in Omaha at the time of Annual Conference. For example, if Omaha is orange on the CDC COVID Tracker, the level for Annual Conference will be at least orange (and might be red, since red is a higher level of precaution). We expect to make a decision about the level sometime in mid or late June.

Plan Level	Precautions
<p>Blue More than 90% of counties across the country report a low (blue) level of transmission; no counties are in the orange or red zones; the Omaha area is blue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mandated restrictions. • Individuals can choose to do what feels comfortable to them. • All activities will proceed as planned.
<p>Yellow More than 90% of counties across the country report a low (blue) or moderate (yellow) level of transmission; no counties are in the red zone; the Omaha area is blue or yellow</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks will be required at all times in the convention center, but individuals may choose a mask with which they are comfortable. • We can engage in congregational singing. • Meal events will take place as planned. Masks may be removed to eat, but should be put back on immediately when done eating.
<p>Orange More than 10% of counties across the country report a substantial (orange or red) level of transmission; the Omaha area is not red</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N95 or KN95 masks will be required at all times in the convention center. • We can engage in congregational singing. • Meal events will take place, but limits will be placed on numbers to allow for more social distancing and planners will be asked to present the program first and participants will be given a boxed meal they can either eat in the room or take with them to eat elsewhere. • Social distancing markers will be placed on the floor in areas where people tend to congregate in lines.
<p>Red More than 10% of counties across the country report a high (red) level of transmission OR the Omaha area is red</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N95 or KN95 masks will be required at all times in the convention center. • We will NOT engage in congregational singing. • No food will be served in the convention center. While we will not be eating together, planners of meal events can still host participants for the program portion of their event. (Note: Not meeting our Food and Beverage minimum will result in a financial hit to Annual Conference, so Conferencegoers will be given the option of requesting a refund or donating the cost of their meal ticket to support Annual Conference.) • Social distancing markers will be placed on the floor in areas where people tend to congregate in lines. • We will make a hybrid option available for delegates as well as non-delegates. This will only be an option if circumstances demand that we adopt red-level precautions.

If anyone begins to feel ill at Annual Conference, we ask that they get tested and then isolate until they have a test result. If they test positive, they should not return to in-person activities. We ask that anyone who tests positive for COVID while at Annual Conference or immediately following Annual Conference inform the Annual Conference office so we can inform those with whom they might have had close contact (such as other children in children's activities or table-mates during business sessions).

This guidance is rooted in science. However, for Dr. Jacobsen and Dr. Shonk Edwards, the Annual Conference staff, and Program and Arrangements Committee members, this is not just a matter of science, but a matter of faith. Jesus calls us to love one another, to care for the lost and the least. As members of a community of faith, we must be willing to adhere to precautions that protect the lives and health of others—our brothers and sisters within the community of faith and the people of Omaha who will be welcoming us into their community. This is why (high quality) masks may be required; they are proven to protect others.

Annual Conference is a multi-generational event bringing people from across the country together for a large indoor event during which social distancing is not always possible and activities like singing and sharing meals together are important. In that single sentence describing Annual Conference, we find a compilation of proven risk factors. We want to gather in person, but also want to do so in a way that is safe and reflects our faith-based commitment to care for the most vulnerable among us.

Please note, we offer this plan as guidance in your decision-making, but as science evolves and new information becomes available, we may revise this plan in response to changing circumstances. These are challenging times and we ask for your grace and cooperation in our efforts to make Annual Conference a healthy and productive event.

Program and Arrangements Committee

David Sollenberger, Moderator

Tim McElwee, Moderator-Elect

Jim Beckwith, Annual Conference Secretary

Carol Higgs Elmore

Beth Jarrett

Nathan Hollenberg

Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, Director of Annual Conference

Debbie Noffsinger, Conference Assistant

Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.

Current policies in place at CHI Health (Convention) Center (as of January 20, 2022)

find more information at:

[COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS - CHI Health Center Arena \(chihealthcenteromaha.com\)](https://www.chihealthcenteromaha.com/COVID-19-PRECAUTIONS)

- In compliance with Douglas County Health Department's mask mandate that went into effect on January 12 and will remain in place for four weeks before being reevaluated, face coverings must be worn in the CHI Health Center. Beyond this, the convention center has assured us that staff who interact with guests will comply with any precautions we put in place for our event.
- Hand sanitizing stations are available throughout the building.
- Employees who become symptomatic are required to self-report, at which point they are directed to immediately end their shift and leave the building.
- CHI Health Center is staffing additional custodial crews before, during and after events who routinely use disinfectant for daily cleaning procedures. Areas of frequent human contact (restrooms, hard surfaces, doorknobs) are cleaned multiple times a day. They are using the Clorox Total 360 system that utilizes electrostatic technology and non-bleach Clorox products for surface treatment with the capability to clean even the hardest-to-reach places.
- Visual reminders are posted throughout the building to encourage social distancing, to avoid handshaking, or touching one's face.
- The in-house food services provider has modified front and back of house procedures in consideration of best safety practices, including training, personal hygiene, sanitation, reduced touchpoints in food preparation, required masking for unvaccinated workers.
- The CHI Health Center is a cash free environment. All major debit and credit cards are accepted and Cash 2 Card machines are available onsite for customer use.