

COVID-19 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

Guidelines for Faith-based Gatherings in Places of Worship

Manitoba 

The below in-person service guidelines apply to both indoor and outdoor faith based gatherings, except where more specific provincial guidance exists, such as the guidelines for outdoor drive-in events which is available at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/resources/index.html.

Places of worship should follow gathering size limitations, and be aware that public health orders around gathering size are subject to change. Preference is given to holding gatherings outdoors to further minimize the risk, where possible and weather permitting.

Multiple services may be needed depending on the size of the congregation. It is important to note that faith-based gatherings in places of worship have demonstrated to be a higher risk setting as shown by the number of outbreaks reported earlier in the pandemic from these types of gatherings. Congregants should focus on adhering to public health guidance on physical distancing, mask wearing, hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, screening for symptoms and staying home if sick (even if symptoms are mild), or if required to self-isolate (quarantine) to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The following guidelines should be followed by all individuals who attend places of worship.

General guidelines:

- Congregants, staff, and volunteers should be reminded to [focus on the fundamentals](#). This includes:
 - o checking yourself for symptoms every day (using the [COVID-19 Screening Tool](#))
 - o staying home when you are sick (even if symptoms are mild), or if you are required to self-isolate (quarantine) due to travel or exposure
 - o getting tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19
 - o practicing proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette
 - o maintaining physical distancing
 - o wearing a mask when physical distancing is not possible, or as required
- Review and follow current Public Health Orders, including direction for places of worship.
- People at higher risk of serious illness (including people with chronic health conditions, a weakened immune system or people aged 60 years or older) may consider waiting to return to these activities, when they involve other people, until public health advice changes because of COVID-19 immunization and lower transmission risk.
- Virtual opportunities should continue to be offered or should be explored for those who are not able to attend, or who may prefer to participate in these activities from home.
- Consider creative options to in-person attendance such as “drive-in” outdoor events where congregants stay in their vehicles for the duration of the service. Outdoor drive-in events should follow applicable guidelines.
- Encourage congregants to visit their place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services (e.g., confession).
- All congregants, staff, and volunteers should screen themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 or exposures prior to entering the facility. Post [signage](#) in highly visible areas to aid congregants in screening themselves for symptoms and exposures. Where possible, provide necessary information in languages preferred by congregants.

- Where possible, congregants should register for attendance at in-person services to ensure occupancy limits are followed. This also allows the facility to maintain lists with contact information of all congregants for at least 21 days to ensure appropriate public health follow-up can take place if a congregant is exposed to COVID-19 during the service.
- Designate health and safety representatives to develop processes and ensure congregants are following COVID-19 guidance recommendations.

Physical Distancing and Site Specific Guidance:

- Maintain single points of entry and exit to the building and ensure physical distancing is maintained. Consideration must be given to how people enter/exit seating areas.
- Line-ups and areas where people congregate (e.g., foyer, washrooms) should be monitored to ensure congregants maintain a physical distance of two metres/six feet.
- Floor markers may be installed to help congregants with maintaining separation, and signs should be posted to remind congregants to maintain their distance from people outside of their household. Establish different points of entry and exit from high-traffic areas, where feasible to do so.
- Seating arrangements should allow for a two metre/six foot separation on all sides between congregants from different households. When standing, a two metre/six foot separation is still required for non-household members.
- If the activity is indoors, minimize the time that people are together. There is currently no evidence on a specific amount of time that is safe.
- Ensure that ventilation systems are operating and functioning properly. If possible, increase ventilation by opening windows. Use a large space that can accommodate physical distancing. Allow a break between groups for air exchange in the room, with the timeframe between groups based on the room's air exchange. For more information, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Guidance on Indoor Ventilation during the Pandemic](#) page.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Ensure hand hygiene stations with sanitizer containing at least 60 per cent alcohol content, are available at entry, exit and throughout the facility.
 - All common touch surfaces must be frequently cleaned/disinfected with [Health Canada approved disinfectants](#) that kill viruses, at minimum twice daily.
 - Washrooms must have frequent cleaning and disinfection, and must be cleaned and disinfected after each congregational service. Develop and post a cleaning and disinfection schedule to assist facilities in ensuring commonly touched surfaces and washrooms are adequately cleaned and disinfected.
 - Shared equipment and objects (e.g., microphones, speakers, ceremonial objects, books, hymns, prayer mats) should be cleaned and disinfected after each use. Consider pre-recording readings and single use paper bulletins or project materials to alleviate the need for people to share a microphone or hymnals.
 - o If shared equipment cannot be cleaned and disinfected between congregants, then it should be removed and not used, i.e. song books, pens, pencils.
 - o If it is required for religious/spiritual reasons, touching of ceremonial objects (e.g., statues, religious symbols, rings, etc.) may occur if individuals perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object, and the objects are cleaned before and after use.
 - o Prayer mats, prayer beads, Qur'ans and other holy books and items should not be shared. They can be temporarily stowed away safely.
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- If washing facilities are required, they should include hand hygiene products (soap, water paper towels).
- Uniforms or gowns should not be shared and should be **laundered after each use**.
- Frequency and additional cleaning and disinfection information can be found on the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) site.

Masks

- Mask-wearing is recommended in both indoor and outdoor settings, including when singing and when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Check the current [public health orders](#) for additional details on settings where masks are required.

Specific Considerations for Faith Based Gatherings

- Faith-based activities, rituals and practices should be reviewed to determine if they increase the risk of spreading COVID-19, with a focus on those that increase the risk of COVID-19 through contact (touching surfaces) or droplet transmission (sharing food/drink, sneezing, coughing, singing). Consider discontinuing or altering practices or activities that increase risk.
 - Congregants are advised to physically distance themselves from members outside of their household, except for brief necessary exchanges. Traditional greetings such as handshakes should be avoided. Ushers and greeters must maintain a physical (social) distance and avoid physical contact with congregants. Monitor young children to ensure they maintain a two metre/six foot distance from other children and congregants.
 - o Ceremonial traditions that involve close contact, including handling of the Torah scroll or baptisms, should be altered to maintain a two metre/six foot separation.
 - o Consider alternative methods to the traditional passing of the peace with a handshake, such as a nod of the head, bow or other appropriate gesture that maintains a two metre/six foot separation.
 - Passing objects between congregants, such as offering baskets/donation collection plates, is not advised. Rather, consider providing online offering/giving options, placing a stationary basket at the front of the facility or other alternatives to offering baskets/donation collection plates.
 - Instructional settings for children (e.g., Sunday school) should follow the applicable public health order guidance for day camps. Small group, instructional settings for adults (e.g., Bible study) must follow physical distancing and gathering size requirements, bearing in mind that there is currently no evidence on a specific amount of time that is safe. Therefore, if possible, minimize the time spent together in-person and increase ventilation by opening windows or meeting outside.
 - Singing and music can be very important in faith-based, spiritual, and worship practices. Singing and playing wind instruments can also produce respiratory droplets and aerosols that can transmit the virus. Choirs, vocalists, and musicians should refer to the applicable [guidelines for music](#). In addition:
 - o Discourage congregational singing and chanting. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music.
 - o Consider a soloist or other lower risk instrumentalist, such as a pianist.
 - o Consider using pre-recorded audio or video rather than live vocalists or instrumentalists.
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- Provision of food and beverages (e.g. communion) before, during or after faith based activities or events is strongly discouraged because of the increased risk of the inherent close contact involved with offering and accepting the food and drinks. Consider alternatives to traditional methods that maintain physical distancing and follow good hand hygiene, such as:
 - o placing pre-packaged food and drink in individual portions at a designated place in the facility for congregants to pick up, eliminating the need for physical contact between designated serving individuals and congregants.
 - o eliminating the practice of congregants sharing drink containers or utensils (e.g., spoon, plates, chalice, etc.).
 - Group meals continue to be discouraged. Other social gatherings that occur outside of in-person services should follow all guidelines related to physical distancing, group size, cleaning and disinfection, food and drink, and other applicable guidelines.
 - Avoid offering shared receptacles for liquid (e.g. holy water fonts).
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