

Ministry of Health

# COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies

Version 2 — August 21, 2020

## Highlight of Changes:

This updated version indicates that several activities which may be suspended or adapted with mitigation measures in place. For example:

- Singing and playing of brass and wind instruments with restrictions;
- Hosting social gatherings before/after in-person services that adhere to the public gathering limits and with physical distancing in place; and
- Sharing of objects or materials (e.g., books, communion, microphones, prayer mats) with restrictions.

This advice document provides basic information only. It is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance for the delivery/provision of a religious service, rite or ceremony or the operation of places of worship. It also is not intended to provide, nor does it replace, medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, or legal advice.

All religious services, rites, and ceremonies must adhere to the appropriate emergency orders under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, [particularly Stage 3: O. Reg 364/20](#).

In the event of any conflict between this document and any emergency orders or directives issued by the Minister of Health or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the emergency order or directive prevails.

## Advice for Health and Safety

- Consider using multiple communication mechanisms (signage, verbal, pre-recorded messages) to remind individuals about:
  - [COVID-19 symptoms](#);
  - The importance of [physical distancing](#) while at the service, rite or ceremony, or place of worship;
  - The importance of frequent and proper [hand hygiene](#);
  - Respiratory etiquette – promote appropriate covering of coughs and sneezes (i.e., coughing into sleeves and not hands, or using a tissue followed by performing hand hygiene) and;
  - Avoid touching face with unwashed hands.
- Manage the flow of individuals to prevent crowding and maintain 2 metre separation of individuals, especially at entrances, exits, hallways, and restrooms.
- At the entrances and every room (as applicable), ensure that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available with greater than 60% alcohol. All individuals should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving.
- Consider cohorting individuals and families. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different individuals/families.
- Ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres between all individuals not in the same household [or social circle](#). Consider clear markings on floors or furniture to promote physical distancing.
- It is strongly recommended that all individuals wear a face covering in all indoor spaces, public spaces and in outdoor spaces where physical distancing may be a challenge or not possible. Note that local municipalities may have enacted by-laws or local medical officers of health may have issued Section 22 orders under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, mandating the use of face coverings in some settings. Certain other medical officers of health may have mandated the use of face coverings through

reference to emergency orders. Refer to local municipal or public health unit webpages for more information.

- Adapt or suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission, which may include:
  - Singing, choirs and playing wind or brass instruments.
    - Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singing or wind or brass instrumental music.
    - Group singing is strongly discouraged. However, if more than one person is singing, limit the number of people singing to the fewest possible.
    - Anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be 2 metres from anyone else and separated by an impermeable barrier. If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be separated from any other person (outside of the same household or social circle) to the greatest extent possible (but at least 2 metres).
  - Social gatherings before or after in-person services, including those where food and drink are shared. If held, social gatherings are subject to public gathering limits, and physical distancing is required. Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites, and ceremonies.
  - Sharing or distributing materials or objects, which may include but is not limited to: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, etc. If any materials or objects are shared or distributed:
    - Ensure that hand hygiene is performed prior to distribution or sharing;
    - Consider leaving objects or materials to be distributed on a table for individuals to pick up; and/or
    - Limit the number of individuals who have contact with materials or objects. Ensure any materials or objects that are returned or

accessed within the setting are disinfected or not re-used immediately.

- Regular childcare and children's programming. Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [Ministry of Health's COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- Protect vulnerable individuals, especially those over 70 and those who are immuno-compromised, etc. To protect these persons, places of worship may:
  - Recommend vulnerable individuals take part in virtual or drive-in services; or
  - Offer a dedicated service for them.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of worshippers), whichever is more frequent. Surfaces most likely to become contaminated include, but are not limited to, doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons, water fountain/cooler knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, ceremonial objects, electronic devices, and tabletops. Refer to [Public Health Ontario's Environmental Cleaning fact sheet](#):
  - Only use cleaning and disinfectant products that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN); it should be stated on product packaging. Low-level hospital grade disinfectants may be used; and
  - Check expiry dates of cleaning and disinfectant products used and always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Ensure that the products used are compatible with the item to be cleaned and disinfected.f

## Advice for Screening

- All individuals, including children, should be screened upon arrival, prior to entry, each day they attend services. Deny entry to any individual who:
  - Has any of the symptoms outlined in the COVID-19 symptoms document on the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 webpage.

- Has come in close contact with a person with symptoms of COVID-19 or who has come in close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, in the past 14 days.
  - Has travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days.
- [Post signage](#) on the entry door and other visible locations throughout to prompt anyone to self-identify if they feel unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, or been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Consider keeping a record of all individuals who attend services or enter the facility (including names, contact information, dates and times), which may help support case and contact tracing in the event of an outbreak.

## Resources

- Refer to [Public Health Ontario](#) for fact sheets on:
  - Self-assessment
  - How to self-isolate
  - Physical distancing
  - How to wash your hands
  - Cleaning and disinfection
- Refer to [How Ontario is responding to COVID-19 webpage](#) for general information.
- Refer to the [Ministry of Health \(MOH\) COVID-19 webpage](#) for Guidance Documents and the [Directives, Memorandums and Other Resources webpage](#) regularly for up-to-date directives on COVID-19.