

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

The following guidance is intended to support community faith leaders and other organizers of gatherings for religious services, rites or ceremonies (including [weddings](#) and [funerals](#)).

Gathering Limits

Under the [Reopening Ontario Act – Stage 3 Orders](#), all religious services, rites, or ceremonies and related celebrations/events must comply with the following gathering restrictions:

	Religious service, rite, or ceremony	Staffed event/social gathering ^b at a licensed facility ^c	Private event/social gathering at a private home setting ^d
Indoor	30 per cent capacity of any particular room in the building or structure, or less	50 people or less	10 people or less
Outdoor	100 people or less ^a	100 or less	25 people or less
All gathering limits are subject to the ability to maintain two metres/six feet physical distancing.			

^a Includes organized religious services in private backyards. Social gatherings before or after this type of service are limited to 25 people or less outdoors or 10 people indoors.

^b Includes social activities before and/or after service, receptions with food after service etc., and may be planned or spontaneous.

^c Includes businesses and facilities operating in accordance with [O. Reg. 364/20](#) (e.g. places of worship, restaurants, bars, cinemas, gyms, and recreational sporting or performing art events).

^d Includes unstaffed businesses or facilities (e.g. private residences, backyards, parks, and other recreation areas). See [COVID-19 Guidance for Indoor & Outdoor Events & Gatherings](#) for more information.

Plan for physical distancing

[Physical distancing](#) means keeping a distance of two meters/six feet from others.

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculate the maximum number of attendees that can be accommodated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This must be based on the gathering limits noted above, or the maximum number that can maintain physical distancing from others, whichever is less. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that physical distance is maintained inside and outside. Manage the flow of individuals that encourages one-way movement to prevent crowding and encourage physical distancing, especially at entrances, exits, hallways, and restrooms.

Plan for physical distancing

[Physical distancing](#) means keeping a distance of two meters/six feet from others.

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Those from the same household or social circle may sit together, but all others must be two metres/six feet apart in all directions. ○ Children under two years of age are not included in the calculation. ● Consider grouping 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. ● Plan and modify the layout of your setting to ensure enough space is provided for staff, volunteers and visitors to maintain physical distancing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remove, mark or rope off seating to ensure a two metre/six foot distance between rows and seats. ○ Consider assigning seats and encourage visitors to remain in their designated space throughout the service. ○ Consider the need for markings on floors or furniture to promote physical distancing. ● Anticipate places where people will naturally gather (e.g. outside, hallway, foyer). Assign staff or volunteers to remind them about physical distancing. ● Consider having more services and virtual options if demand exceeds the occupancy limits. ● Post physical distancing signs throughout the space (e.g. entrances, hallways, elevators, kitchens and meeting rooms). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider having stewards manage the selection of seating and/or exit the room row by row.

Encourage proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide hand sanitizer stations at entrances, and also within each room as necessary. • Monitor supplies to ensure adequate amounts of liquid soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissues and waste receptacles with lined plastic bags. • Post Hand Washing, Cover your Cough, Hand Sanitizing and mask policy signage in suitable locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 70-90% alcohol concentration, provided hands are not visibly soiled. • Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. • Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve. • Incorporate hand hygiene into breaks between activities. • Use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for proper hand hygiene. Gloves are not necessary, but if being used, it is important to change gloves when changing tasks, or more often as necessary. Wash hands with soap and water for 15 seconds or use hand sanitizer before putting on and after taking off gloves.

Encourage proper use of masks or face coverings

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a policy on the wearing of masks. Refer to Guidance on Mask and Face Covering Bylaw for a sample policy your organization can adapt. • Train staff on the new bylaw and new policy, including who is exempt and how to safely wear a cloth mask or face covering. More information is available here. • Post signage indicating that masks are required. • Some people cannot wear a mask and may be exempted from the bylaw. No one is required to provide proof of exemption. Consider providing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone must wear a mask indoors, with some exceptions, as per the City mask bylaw. • A mask or face covering should be worn outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained. • Masks or face coverings should not be used by children under the age of two and anyone who has trouble breathing.

alternatives for those who cannot wear a mask (e.g. virtual services, specific timed services).

Plan to adapt, modify or suspend activities to reduce virus spread

Preparing to Reopen

- Consider holding services and programs outdoors.
- Consider virtual options (e.g. live streaming, pre-recordings). Even after in-person services have restarted, these may be appropriate for the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions.
- Consider hosting 'drive-in' services.
- Where possible, use equipment and materials that can be easily cleaned and disinfected or are single-use only.
- Suspend activities that increase the risk of [disease transmission](#), which include:
 - Touching or close physical contact between people (e.g. hugging, handshaking).
 - Sharing and/or distributing objects and materials (e.g. common chalice, utensils including spoons, plates, receptacles and washing facilities; holy water stoup; books, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, chalices, collection/offering plates).
- For [social gatherings](#) before or after in-person services, adhere to the public gathering limits as described above and ensure physical distancing. Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites, and ceremonies.
- Childcare and children's programming should operate in accordance with [COVID-19 Guidance for Day Camps](#) and [Early Years](#)

After Reopening

- Wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. mask, eye protection such as goggles or face shields) for rites or practices requiring close physical contact (e.g. baptism, circumcision).
- Encourage speakers to use a microphone instead of projecting loudly, in order to reduce the spread of droplets/aerosols.
 - Do not share microphones. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use
- For drive-in services:
 - Only members of the same household or social circle should be in the same vehicle.
 - Discourage people from leaving their vehicles, except to use the washroom.
 - Vehicles must be parked at least two metres/six feet apart.
 - Discourage idling the car engines.
- For activities that involve distributing/sharing of materials or objects (e.g. communion):
 - Limit the number of individuals who have contact with materials/objects.
 - Ensure that hand hygiene is performed prior to distribution or sharing.
 - Consider leaving materials/objects to be distributed on a table for individuals to pick up.
 - Consider single-use materials or ensure that materials/objects are disinfected or not re-used immediately.

[Guidelines](#) for younger children.
Childcare for infants is discouraged.

Modify or suspend singing and playing instruments

Although the evidence on the risk associated with singing and playing wind instruments is incomplete and contradictory, it is recommended to treat these activities with caution.

Preparing to Reopen

- Consider using audio or video recordings.
- Use an organ, piano or stringed instruments rather than brass or woodwind.
- Consider using a cantor or soloist only, or limit the number of people in a choir.

After Reopening

- Anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be separated from others outside their household or social circle by at least two metres/six feet.
 - An impermeable barrier may also be used (e.g. plexiglass).
- Congregational singing is strongly discouraged, even with masks. Singing may contribute to the spread of the virus.

Implement health screening

Screening means having people check whether they have certain symptoms or risk factors, which might indicate that they have COVID-19. This may be done by self-assessment (passive screening), e.g. online or looking at a poster, or by asking questions directly (active screening).

Preparing to Reopen

- Download the [COVID-19 symptom screening posters and checklists](#) and ensure these are displayed prominently at all entrances.

After Reopening

- Communicate to everyone that they must stay home if they are ill.
- Conduct [active screening](#) of staff/volunteers before entering each day. Questions can be answered on paper, online, or by asking people directly.
- Use [posters](#) to encourage passive screening of visitors before entering.
- Direct anyone who answers YES to any of the screening questions to go home immediately, self-isolate, and contact Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 or go to an [assessment centre](#) to get tested.

Maintain attendance records	
Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain voluntary attendance records of all staff, members and visitors to support public health contact tracing efforts (i.e. name, date, time (or event), email address or phone number) for 30 days. Information may be gathered beforehand if there is online registration or invitation, or collected at the entrance, either verbally by a volunteer or written on a sheet (but do not share pen). • Any personal information that is collected for COVID-19 contact tracing can only be used for this purpose, unless an individual provides their consent. Records should only be kept for 30 days, and then shredded.

Develop plans for responding to illness onsite	
Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop step-by-step plans for caring for someone who develops COVID-19 symptoms while at your place of worship. • Identify a space where they can be isolated from others until they can go home safely in a private vehicle and/or undergo medical assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone contracts COVID-19 and was contagious onsite, Toronto Public Health will investigate and notify individuals who may have been exposed to the virus. • Contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 for guidance if you have been notified that an employee, volunteer, or visitor has tested positive, and/or you have concerns that others may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19.

Enhance cleaning and disinfection	
Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly, on surfaces and objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign staff or volunteers to complete cleaning and disinfection duties. Post and maintain a log to track cleaning and disinfecting activities.

Enhance cleaning and disinfection

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Public Health Ontario's Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet. Refer to Health Canada's lists of hard-surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus (COVID-19) for information on disinfectants. Chlorine bleach solutions may be prepared and used for disinfection if appropriate for the surface. Schedule sufficient time between services for proper cleaning and disinfection of high traffic areas and frequently touched surfaces. Use printed sheets/leaflets in preference to hymn/prayer books. If the latter are used, keep for a week between uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure frequent (minimum twice a day, when open) cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and common areas such as door handles, counters, cabinet doors, light switches, faucets, toilet handles, handrails, touch screen surfaces, keypads and frequently used ceremonial objects.

Increase public health awareness

Preparing to Reopen	After Reopening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download and display posters to promote messages about how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical Distancing Face & Mask Coverings Screening Posters for Entrances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate to your community about the changes you have made to protect them against COVID-19. Update information on your website, voice mail, social media, etc. Encourage staff and visitors to download the COVID Alert app so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.

Revised September 18, 2020

Other Resources

[COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)

[Planning a Funeral Reception / Celebration of Life during COVID-19 Checklist](#)

[COVID-19 Checklist for Planning a Wedding](#)

[Guidance for Drive-in/Drive-thru Events](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Employers, Workplaces and Businesses](#)

More information

Provincial orders under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) and/or [guidance related to religious services, rites or ceremonies](#) may change. Please check the [City of Toronto website](#) regularly for updated guidance or call us at 416-338-7600.