

COVID-19 Guidance for Planning a Funeral Reception / Celebration of Life

In the midst of a global pandemic, there is still a need to come together to mourn loved ones, to celebrate their life, and to support one another. When planning an event, consider the risks associated with indoor gatherings, as COVID-19 has spread in Ontario in these settings. Having the facts about COVID-19 will help you plan a safer gathering, for you and the people around you. This document will help guide you and your family when planning a gathering to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

When planning an event, adhere to the current public health orders on gathering sizes, with preference given to outdoor events to minimize the risk. Having more guests, with closer interactions and longer time spent together, increases the risk of spreading COVID-19. If COVID-19 is spreading in the community that will increase the risk of spreading COVID-19 at a gathering.

Family or cultural expectations may need to be relaxed to protect the safety of participants.

Consider changing some rituals and practices:

- Limit in-person attendance to a smaller number of immediate family and/or friends.
- Consider hosting a memorial service virtually, or delay it for when public health measures are less restrictive, or when you can host it outdoors.
- Host a virtual service or create a virtual memory book, blog, or webpage for family and friends to share memories, photos or messages of support.
- Create aids to have attendees maintain a two metre/six foot distance from each other, facility staff, and officiants.
- Seek guidance from a funeral director, if applicable.
- If food is offered at a reception, serve individual plates. Avoid potluck, buffet or family-style meals. Do not share food or utensils.
- In some cultures, bringing gifts and food is an expression of care. Keep a two metre/six foot distance when delivering food or gifts, or consider sending gift cards with contactless food delivery services.

Use technology to connect virtually to support the grieving process

- Use phone or video chat to share stories, photos, offer support or a virtual hug.
- Organize virtual events with family and friends for prayer, spiritual readings or sharing memories.

- Ask family and friends to contribute their memories and stories virtually by emails, e-cards or on social media, or to sign the guest book on the funeral home website.

Consider health risks

Think of your family and friends who are older, unwell, or have health issues that make them more vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. Consider offering other ways for people to participate if they cannot be there in person.

Risks	Size of Gathering / Location	What to do at the gathering to prevent COVID-19
<p>lower risk</p>  <p>highest risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ virtual activities and events ➤ outdoor gatherings ➤ indoor gatherings – small ➤ indoor gatherings - large ➤ gatherings with close contact (not physically distancing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • screen visitors for symptoms of COVID-19 • clean hands often • provide hand sanitizer • allow space for physical distancing • limiting guests to maintain physical distance • wear a mask • host event in well-ventilated areas • avoid handshakes, hugs or kisses

Physical distancing is crucial to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Masks can help lower the risk, especially when physical distancing is difficult.

Planning Checklist

A. Stay informed

- Ask questions of the service providers you hire (e.g. ceremony and reception venues, florist, and food service vendor).
- Check the City's [website](#) for up to date information about COVID-19.

B. Limit attendance

- Limit invitations based on the type of venue (i.e. indoor vs. outdoor).
- Consider offering a virtual component to allow additional friends and family to participate, or those who are at higher risk (e.g. seniors, chronic health condition)
- Receptions held at a restaurant or place that serves food must comply with COVID-19 regulations for [food premises](#). This includes staying seated at all times except to enter, exit or go to the washroom.

- Arrange seating by [social circles](#). A social circle has a limit of 10 people. A person cannot belong to more than one social circle. A social circle can interact with each another without physical distancing.

Current gathering sizes for private and rented facilities based on the [Reopening Ontario Act](#):

<p>Outdoor events. Mask/face covering should be worn when physical distancing is challenging. <i>Staff and performers hired by the venue do not count towards the gathering size.</i></p>		
<p>Event with NO food or drinks Maximum of 100 people. Guests can mingle and must maintain 6 feet distancing. Wear a mask when physical distancing is difficult (e.g. going to the washroom). No dancing unless hiring a performer. Singers and musicians must physical distance from each other and be separated from guests by plexiglass.</p>	<p>Event with food or drinks Maximum of 100 people. No more than 10 people per table. Stay seated at all times, except to use the washroom or leave. No mingling. No dancing. Performers (dance, sing, perform music) can be hired; must maintain precautions.</p>	<p>Drive-in / drive thru event No maximum. Cars must be parked, 6 feet from each other. Can't leave the car except for the washroom.</p>
<p>Indoor events. Mask/face covering must be worn at all times except when eating. <i>Staff and performers hired by the venue do not count towards gathering size.</i></p>		
<p>Event with NO food or drinks Maximum of 50 people. Guests can mingle and must maintain 6 feet distancing. A mask must be worn at all times. No dancing unless hiring a performer. Singers and musicians must physical distance from each other and be separated from guests by plexiglass.</p>	<p>Event with food or drinks Maximum of 50 people. No more than 10 people per table. Stay seated at all times, except to use the washroom or leave. No mingling. No dancing. Performers (dance, sing, perform music) can be hired; must maintain precautions.</p>	<p>Religious service, rite or ceremony in a place of worship, NO food or drink Up to 30% of the room capacity, based on ability to physically distance. No choir, singing, dancing or performers at this time.</p>

C. Communicate before the event

- Inform your guests about the measures you will be taking to keep everyone safe as well as what is expected of them at the ceremony and/or reception.
- Consider an online RSVP system and promote through social media, newspaper obituary or the funeral home website.
- If there is an option for a virtual service, post instructions on how to access it.
- Ask guests to [self-screen](#) for symptoms of COVID-19 before they arrive. Encourage guests to stay home if they are feeling unwell. Offer a virtual option if they wish to participate.
- Remind guests who have travelled outside of Canada that they must self-isolate for 14 days from the date of their return and should not attend in-person.
- Ask attendees to refrain from hugging, kissing and shaking hands during the service or reception. This sets expectations so no one will feel awkward.
- Ask attendees to bring their own mask/face covering. Have extras if people forget to bring one.

D. Encourage [physical distancing](#)

- Space seating two metres/six feet apart for people not in the same social circle.
- Post signs to remind guests to stay two metres/six feet from others not in their social circle.
- Use floor markings to let guests know where to stand in the reception line to stay two metres/six feet apart.
- Remind guests to refrain from hugging, kissing and shaking hands during the service or reception.

E. Hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and face masks

- Wash your hands often. Post [signs](#) encouraging frequent handwashing.
- Have hand sanitizer available at the entrance and in high traffic areas.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Post [signs](#) to encourage people to cough or sneeze into their elbow or tissue.
- A mask must be worn at all times when indoors, except when eating. Toronto mask [bylaw](#) requires all public venues to develop a policy and protocol on the wearing of masks.
- Avoid adjusting your face mask when in use.

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- Children under two years of age, people with health issues that make wearing a mask difficult, and those who are unable to put on a mask without assistance, are exempted from wearing a mask. More information on mask exemptions can be found [here](#).

F. Modifying services

- Avoid close contact or sharing ceremonial objects or personal items among members of different households. Avoid activities that allow guests to congregate or share items.
- Singing and the use of brass or wind instruments is discouraged as respiratory droplets can travel beyond two metres/six feet. If singing or wind instruments are used, performers should maintain a two metre/six foot distance from each other and from guests and must perform behind a physical barrier such as plexiglass.
- If music is played, keep the volume low so the officiants do not need to speak loudly.
- Where appropriate, consider using outdoor spaces.

G. Food at the reception

- Potluck, buffets and self-serve food stations are not permitted.
- Do not share items such as utensils, salt/pepper shakers, or water pitchers
- Family-style meals are not recommended at this time.
- Assign seating, keeping family households and social circles together.
- Guests are to remain seated during food service, except to go to the washroom or to leave. Guests are not permitted to walk about to socialize.
- Guests may remove their mask when eating, but should put their mask back on when going to the washroom or when leaving.

H. Attendance list for contact tracing

- Encourage your guests to download the [COVID Alert app](#).
- If a guest becomes ill during the service/reception, ask them to go home and [self-isolate](#), and call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 or their health care provider for further direction.
- Keep an electronic list of your guests and staff in attendance. Information collected is voluntary, and can only be used by public health for COVID-19 contact tracing. The attendance list can be deleted after 30 days.