

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

Places of worship are required to comply with the provisions set out in the applicable regulation(s) under [The Reopening Act](#). In addition, the province has released its [Roadmap to Reopening](#) which provides plain language requirements for each of the three steps. This local guideline describes the requirements that all religious services, rites, ceremonies and related celebrations must comply with, as well as local recommendations to reduce the risks of transmission of COVID-19. Faith community leaders/organizers are responsible for preventing the risk of infection among staff, volunteers, community members, and visitors who participate in their activities.

Communication

- 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.

Screening

- Staff and volunteers must be [screened](#) before every shift, service or in-person activity. It is strongly advised that all attendees be screened prior to attending an in-person service held indoors. Anyone who fails screening or who is not feeling well, should not attend any in-person service whether indoors or outdoors. Persons who become ill while in the service must go home right away and self-isolate. They can call Telehealth, their health care provider or the [Assessment Centre at the Brant Community Healthcare System](#) for guidance about testing.
- 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 permitted activities (including name, contact information, date and time). This is particularly important if the service is occurring indoors.
- Consider developing a system to RSVP attendance to specific services or events. This may also allow online screening of attendees at the same time.

Physical distancing

- Manage the flow of individuals to prevent crowding and maintain 2 metre separation of individuals, especially at entrances, exits, hallways, and restrooms. Separate entrances and exits may not be necessary as participants usually enter and exit within distinct time periods. Discourage movement against the flow of people moving in the space. It may be necessary to mark off two metre/six foot distances outside and/or in a

vestibule if it is anticipated that lines will form. Consider having someone control leaving the space by seating row.

- 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. Consider clear markings on floors or furniture to promote physical distancing. Remove seating, or if seating is fixed, mark it unavailable or rope it off to ensure a two metre/six foot distance between rows of seating. If the reducing seating capacity will be less than the expected attendance, consider re-arranging the schedule of services to provide more, but smaller, services.

Hand hygiene & face coverings

- At the entrances and every room (as applicable), ensure that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available with greater than 70% alcohol. All individuals should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving.
- Face coverings are required to be worn by members of the public and workers in indoor public places and workplaces, with [limited exceptions](#). For more information, please visit our [website](#).

Adapt or suspend activities

- Adapt or suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission, which may include:
 - Continue or consider offering virtual, outdoor or drive-in services in place of in-person services where practical.
 - Singing, choirs and playing wind or brass instruments:
 - Indoor singing by the congregation is strongly discouraged as it presents a greater risk of transmission. Outdoor singing by the congregation may be done, but this activity must be identified and controlled in your COVID-19 safety plan and social distancing must be maintained.
 - Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singing or wind or brass instrumental music.
 - Soloists or anyone playing wind or brass instruments should be 2 metres from anyone else, separated by an impermeable or plexiglass barrier, and wear a mask when not singing/playing their wind or brass instrument. If there are several soloists taking turns, barriers and equipment should be disinfected prior to each soloist. Consider separate microphones for each soloist or disinfect the microphone between each person and use disposable microphone covers for the head of the microphone.
 - Barriers must be large enough to create an effective barrier between the breathing zones of the people on each side. A person's breathing zone has a diameter of about 60 cm (24 in.) which means it extends 30 cm (12 in.) in every direction from the person's nose.
 - Performers who are not playing wind or brass instruments must physically distance and wear face coverings but do not need to be behind an impermeable barrier

- Consider additional measures such as increasing spacing distance between performers, limiting duration of play for wind/brass instruments and if possible, consider increasing ventilation (open windows, relocate players away from air conditioners/fans, etc.)
- 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 as listed in the current step of Ontario's [Roadmap to Reopening](#). Physical distancing and face coverings are required. Consider suspending all social gatherings, including those that occur before or after the service, and food services at this time.
- Sharing or distributing materials or objects, which may include but is not limited to: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, etc. Use printed service leaflets and discard after service, or use projection or audio-visual systems. 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;
 - Offer a dedicated service for them.
- Capacity limits:
 - Step 1 capacity is set at a maximum of 15 per cent capacity of the room.
 - Step 2 capacity is anticipated to be a maximum of 25 per cent capacity of the room.
- For drive-in religious gatherings:
 - Discourage people from leaving their vehicles during the service, except when using the washroom.
 - Vehicles must be parked 2 metres/6 feet apart or more. Discourage the idling of engines.
 - Individuals involved in the providing the service must stay at least 2 metres/6 feet apart.
 - If faith community leaders, staff or volunteers are to approach a vehicle to provide service to its occupants, everyone needs to wear a mask.
- Outdoor services:
 - Capacity for outdoor services is based on maintaining at least 2 metres distance from those outside your household.

Cleaning & disinfecting

- 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 are approved by Health Canada and have a Drug Identification Number (DIN); it should be stated on product packaging. Low-level hospital grade disinfectants may be used
 - 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.
- Avoid use of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize or disinfect.
- Educate staff on proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact times (amount of time that the product will need to remain wet on a surface to achieve disinfection). Understand safety precautions and requirement for use of mask and gloves.
- Ensure adequate ventilation when using products (e.g. open windows, doors).
- Ensure ventilation systems are operating properly, and replace filters as scheduled or sooner.
- Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towel. Antibacterial soap is not required to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning.

Note: Disinfectant wipes may have a combined cleaning and disinfectant in one solution, but depending on how dirty the surface is, it may need to be pre-cleaned as disinfectants may become ineffective when dirt is present. Check instructions on the product's label.

Other Businesses on Premises

- Places of worship that offer free or rented spaces to other groups or businesses must abide by the [emergency orders](#) of the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, and all applicable public health guidance documents.

For more information, please visit www.bchu.org/coronavirus or call us at 519-753-4937 and press '5'.

This resource was adapted from resources created by [Toronto Public Health](#) and the [Ontario Ministry of Health](#).