

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

In-person gatherings for prayer and/or worship services are permitted with certain conditions. Faith community leaders should carefully consider how and when to re-establish face-to-face activities. Some faith communities may have many members who are older and/or have chronic medical conditions, and it is strongly recommended that provisions be made to enable them to participate in a safe manner. You may wish to continue with online services, either on their own, or in addition to in-person services.

All religious services, rites, and ceremonies must follow guidance from the Ontario [Roadmap to Reopen](#) which is a three-step plan to safely and cautiously reopen the province and gradually lift public health measures.

For an overview of rules currently in effect:

- [COVID-19 public health measures and advice](#)

For **detailed rules**, please visit the regulations below. Note that all regulations include general rules applicable to all businesses and organizations that are open:

- [Step 1 - Ontario Regulation 82/20](#)
- [Step 2 - Ontario Regulation 263/20](#)
- [Step 3 - Ontario Regulation 364/20](#)

Safety Plans

- The person responsible for the business, place, facility or establishment shall ensure that a [safety plan](#) has been created, posted in a location where individuals working at that location can access it and shall be made available to any person for review upon request.
- The safety plan shall describe the measures and procedures which have been or will be implemented in the business, place, facility or establishment to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19.
- Includes: screening, physical distancing, masks or face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, and the wearing of personal protective equipment (including eye protection).

For a guide and checklist to prepare your safety plan, visit [Develop your COVID-19 safety plan](#).

Capacity Limits

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony (does not apply to receptions)	<p>15% capacity indoors of the room</p> <p>Outdoor permitted with capacity limited to permit physical distancing of 2 metres</p>	<p>Indoor permitted at 25% capacity of the room</p> <p>Outdoor permitted with capacity limited to permit physical distancing of 2 metres</p>	<p>Indoor and outdoor permitted with capacity limited to permit physical distancing of 2 metres</p>
Social gatherings before or after a service, rite or ceremony (e.g., wedding or funeral reception)	<p>Maximum 10 people for outdoor gatherings</p>	<p>Maximum 25 people for outdoor gatherings</p> <p>Maximum 5 people for indoor gatherings</p>	<p>Maximum 100 people for outdoor gatherings</p> <p>Maximum 25 people for indoor gatherings</p>

Section 22 Class Order – Face Coverings

- The local [Section 22 Class Order, which](#) requires that face coverings be worn in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings. Face coverings must be worn in all indoor areas, including but not limited to congregation areas, public washrooms, meeting rooms, and lobbies.
- The [Section 22 Class Order](#) also requires that alcohol-based hand rub be available at all entrances and exits for the use of all persons entering or exiting all churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings.

A Brief Overview of Ministry of Health COVID-19 Advice – Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies

For details on the below, it is strongly advised to review the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#).

- [Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends](#) taking precautions during activities that increase the risk of disease transmission, including:
 - Ensuring that social gatherings before or after in-person services, follow physical distancing requirements and current gathering limits (see table above)
 - Taking precautions if the following activities occur: Singing, choirs and playing wind or brass instruments. Precautions may include ensuring distancing is maintained and/or the use of impermeable barriers, e.g. plexiglass (see [Ontario Guidance for details](#)).
 - Taking precautions (e.g., managing distancing, practising hand hygiene) if sharing or distributing of materials or objects such as: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, chalices, collection plates.
- Regular childcare or children's programming. Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- Protect vulnerable individuals, especially those over 70+ years old and those who have chronic medical conditions.
- Maintain a distance of two metres/six feet between all people, as much as possible.
- Avoid opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly through surfaces and objects, including objects that may be used in rituals or ceremonies.

Faith community leaders /organizers are responsible for preventing the risk of infection among staff, volunteers, community members, and visitors who participate in their activities.

The remainder of this document provides additional guidance, as well as details that are intended to support the implementation of the items above.

Preparation for Services

- Consider adding COVID-19 information to your organization's website.
- Consider alternative ways to include individuals who are at greater risk of serious consequences from COVID-19. To support vulnerable members, consider continuing to offer virtual or drive-in services or holding an exclusive and dedicated service for vulnerable individuals may also be an option.
- Plan how to ensure physical distancing (two metres) in the available space.
- Cohort (i.e., group) individuals and families. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize the potential impact of mixing different individuals/families.
- Consider developing a system to RSVP planned attendance to specific services or events. This may be an opportunity to also pre-screen (see Screening section below for additional details).
- Reorganize seating, or if seating is fixed, mark or rope off a two-metre distance as being unavailable between rows and seats
- Plan how to manage entry and exit within your building to support distancing
- If it is anticipated that crowds will form outside or in a vestibule, consider having two metre distance markings on the ground, and someone to manage the crowd and remind members about physical distancing while entering and exiting.
- As per the [Section 22 Class Order](#), alcohol-based hand rub (60-90% alcohol concentration) must be available at all entrances and exits to help encourage hand hygiene when entering and leaving.
- Ensure all water systems (e.g. drinking fountains, taps) are safe to use after a [prolonged facility shutdown](#) to minimize risk of diseases associated with stagnant water. If drinking fountains are available, limit their use to refilling water bottles (not drinking directly from) and ensure they are frequently cleaned and disinfected.
- Develop and implement a schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfecting.

Training

Instruct staff and volunteers on proper [hand hygiene](#) techniques and respiratory etiquette, when to use masks, [how to wear a mask](#), and how to clean or discard single use masks appropriately.

Print and Post Signs

- COVID-19 self-screening signs should be posted at all entrances.
- [Business friendly sign](#)
- [Screening Poster](#)
- [Hand washing](#), [face covering](#), [physical distancing](#) signs should be posted in high visibility areas.

Screening

It is recommended that individuals, including children, should be screened prior to entry, each day they attend services. Set up a screening station away from the entrance to avoid crowding. The following tools can be used to support screening:

- [Provincial online self-assessment tool](#)
- [Screening Poster](#)

Staff and volunteers must inform the person they report to if they are sick and/or unwell and stay home. Staff and volunteers must be screened before starting their duties.

Persons who become ill or experience symptoms of COVID-19 must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). Advise person to:

- Visit an [assessment centre](#) to be tested, and/or
- Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider

Record Names and Contact Information

It is recommended that the person responsible for the place of worship:

- Record the name and contact information of every member of the public who attends each service, rite, ceremony or gathering
- Maintain the records for a period of at least one month; and
- Only disclose the records to a medical officer of health or an inspector under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* on request for a purpose specified in section 2 of that Act or as otherwise required by law.

During Services

- Modify activities during the service to ensure that there is a two-metre distance between individuals from different households.
- Children should remain with their parents.
- Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- The [Section 22 Class Order](#) requires face coverings to be worn in all indoor public spaces in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings. Visitors can bring their own non-medical face coverings.
- [Non-medical cloth face coverings](#) can be made with household items such as a T-shirt or bedsheet, or a bandana may be used. Physical distancing is still required even when using a face covering.
- Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave. For example, upon arrival, during exchange of the Peace, or at the end of services.

- Rituals involving close physical contact (e.g., baptism, circumcision) or shared items (e.g., chalices, utensils, plates, receptacles, washing facilities) are strongly discouraged at this time.
 - If rituals involving close physical contact must be performed, considerations need to be made to perform them safely such as use of appropriate personal protective equipment.
- The use of holy water rites/stoups is not recommended.
- In lieu of collection/offering plates consider a designated touchless area to offer donations or use online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines.
- Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with hand sanitizer stations (60-90% alcohol concentration). Young children should be supervised when using hand sanitizer.
- Promote good [respiratory etiquette](#). Cover the mouth and nose with elbow when coughing or sneezing or use a tissue then discard tissue in waste bin. Wash or sanitize hands afterwards.
- Avoid use of items that are difficult to clean or disinfect.
- Limit handing out or sharing items that cannot be cleaned and sanitized before and after use (e.g., books, hymns, prayer mats).
- Use printed service leaflets and discard after the service or use projection or audio-visual systems.
- Ensure any materials or objects returned are cleaned and disinfected or not used immediately.
- Do not share microphones. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use.

Singing and Instrumental Music

- The risk of transmitting COVID-19 is high during singing and the use of brass or wind instruments.
- Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singings or wind or brass instrumental music.
- Group singing or singing by the congregation, as a whole, is strongly discouraged even if masks/face coverings are being worn by staff, volunteers and attendees.
 - If engaging in singing or the playing of wind or brass instruments, it is strongly recommended these activities occur outdoors.
- If an officiant or choir sing or play wind or brass instruments, it is strongly advised that the following are in place:
 - Singers and playing wind and brass instruments are separated from any spectators and/or the congregation by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.
 - If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres

from every other person. If space permits, space participants more than two metres.

- Music should not be played at a decibel level that exceeds the level at which normal conversation is possible

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Educate staff on the 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, or use fans).
- Ensure ventilation systems are operating properly and replace filters as scheduled or sooner.
- Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces (e.g., toilets, sinks, door handles, light switches, remote controls, and microphones) twice a day or more, and when visibly dirty.
- Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towels.
- Antibacterial soap is not required to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Refer to [Guidance for Public Washrooms](#).
- Disinfectant kills germs on surfaces. Remove surface dirt first in order for the disinfectant to work.
- Most regular household cleaning products are effective at eliminating the virus.
- Cleaning and disinfectant products should have an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada. Check the expiry dates of products and always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Keep products away from children.
- Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces, and according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Alternatively, chlorine bleach solutions may be used for disinfection.
- Prepare [fresh bleach solution daily](#).
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning the setting.
- See resource for [cleaning and disinfection for public settings](#).

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.

Drive-in Religious Gatherings

- It is recommended that only members of the same household are together in one vehicle.
- People attending the gathering, other than the persons conducting the service, rite or ceremony, must remain in their vehicles during the service (parked two metres apart or more), except when necessary to use a washroom or for health and safety purposes.
- A person who ordinarily uses a non-motorized vehicle because of their religious belief and who attends the gathering must remain within their non-motorized vehicle except where necessary to use a washroom or as may otherwise be required for health and safety and remain positioned at least 2 metres away from other vehicles.
- If faith community leaders, staff or volunteers are to approach a vehicle to provide service to its occupants, everyone is encouraged to wear a mask.

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 regulations (see page 1 of this document for links to provincial regulations).

More information

For more information, visit our website at www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca or call us at 519-822-2715 ext. 4020 (for non-health related questions) or ext. 7006 (health-related questions). [Ministry of Health Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)

References

Toronto Public Health (2020). *COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship*. Retrieved on June 23, 2020 from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/978e-COVID-19-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship.pdf>

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