

GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

Overview

It is critically important that places of worship understand the potential for spread within their congregation and take steps to minimize the risk of spread and the impacts of COVID-19 on some high-risk populations. Places of worship should also follow the [Workplace Guidance for Business Owners](#). Worship leaders are encouraged to continue to hold services remotely and using other creative mechanisms such as drive-in services. All places of worship should follow the public health guidance below and review their programming and worship services to keep everyone, especially the most vulnerable, safe.

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

Supporting Congregants' Safety	- Staff, visitors and congregation should use the self-screening tool before attending. - Offer multiple services and opportunities to worship to reduce the attendance to 50 people or one third of normal worship service attendance, whichever is smaller and whichever ensures physical distancing be maintained. - Staff, visitors, and congregation should be provided information on the requirements for operation and the importance to prevent the spread of COVID-19. - Consider posting signs indicating COVID-19 physical distancing protocols. - Physical distancing must be maintained between people who are not from the same household at all times. - Staff, visitors, and congregation may choose to wear non-medical masks, however, it is not required if physical distancing is maintained at all times. - Infants and children should remain with their parents or guardians at all times. Nursery/children's programs are not permitted. - Individuals not from the same household should be reminded to maintain physical distancing when returning to vehicles or homes. - Consider having cohort families, whereby two cohort families sit together with sufficient spacing between them and other cohort family pairs.
Supporting Staff and Religious Leaders	- Religious leaders should support COVID-19 prevention activities, procedures, and education. - Staff and volunteers should be given information and training about appropriate physical distancing, processes, and hygiene practices. - Staff should wear appropriate PPE if they are unable to maintain 2 metres of separation from congregants.
Facilities	- Control and stagger entry into facilities. - Congregant lineups should be reminded of the importance of physical distancing. This should be clearly marked to prevent congestion. - Organizations should maintain a single point of entry and a separate point of exit. - Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content must be available at facility entrance and exit and available throughout the venue. - Congregants should be reminded to clean their hands on entry and exit. - Develop and implement procedures for increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of high traffic areas, common areas, public washrooms. - Frequently clean and disinfect high-touch/shared surfaces such as: doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets and taps, elevator buttons, railings. - Facilities should be cleaned and sanitized at least once between services. - Seating should be arranged or marked (in case of pews) to ensure social distancing. - Facility rental programs should be suspended if they cannot adhere to gathering restrictions.

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Cultural and Religious Practices	• Services should not include providing cooked food, open food, or beverages. • Services must not include sharing food or beverages. • Services must not include any contact between congregants such as hand shaking or the sharing of communal items (e.g. communion chalice). • Social activities (e.g. communal dinners, lunches) outside of services are not permitted.
Singing	• Congregational singing is a high-risk activity and is not allowed. Infected people can transmit the virus through their saliva or respiratory droplets while singing. Consider soloist music or piano/guitar offertories as an alternative. • While there is no evidence of exactly what a safe distance would be to prevent transmission from someone singing, if one or two people are singing as part of a live streamed or recorded service, factors that would reduce risk would be having the singers face away from others, or having barriers (e.g. Plexiglass) that separate those singing from each other and any others, and ensuring that there are no individuals with chronic medical conditions or those over 65 present. • Note that if the singers are members of the same household, risk mitigation between them would be unnecessary.
Drive in Services	• Drive-in services may be held in designated parking lots or staging areas, and must meet the following conditions: ◦ Event organizers must have measures in place to keep people from leaving their vehicles at the service. ◦ Vehicles should be separated by a minimum of two metres. ◦ Where washroom access is provided, frequent cleaning and disinfection must occur. ◦ People leaving their vehicles to use the washrooms must maintain a minimum of two metres of separation from others at all times.
Support for Public Health	• To enable management of cases through contact tracing and follow-up, keep a listing of congregants who were present for services. • Maintain an up-to-date contact list for all staff and volunteers, including names, addresses and phone numbers.