

June 12, 2020 (Revised on June 16, 2020)

Dear Faith Based Groups and CAOs for the municipalities in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, and of the four First Nations located in Simcoe Muskoka:

On Monday, June 8, 2020, the Province of Ontario outlined plans to move to Phase 2, Stage 2 of the Re-Opening Ontario Plan. Stage 2 will commence today, Friday, June 12, 2020. With the initiation of Stage 2, effective Friday, June 12, 2020, at 12:01 a.m., all places of worship in Ontario will be permitted to open with physical distancing in place and attendance limited to no more than 30 per cent of the building capacity.

To support places of worship to reopen across the province and help to ensure the safety of worshippers, the government will make available guidance to the public. Guidance will also be provided for spiritual leaders and their staff. In the interim, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (the health unit) has developed a number of best practices contained within this letter that will assist faith leaders should they wish to resume services in their places of worship effective today. Accordingly, the health unit is seeking to have this letter distributed to places of worship in our communities; to this end, as we do not have a comprehensive contact list for the places of worship, I ask that the municipalities assist us by distributing the letter to those in your respective communities.

Faith community leaders in places of worship should carefully consider how and when to re-establish face-to-face activities given on-going community transmission of COVID-19 in our communities. Some faith communities may have many members who are older and/or have chronic medical conditions, and therefore it is strongly recommended that provisions be made to enable them to participate in a safe manner. The health unit encourages faith leaders to continue to offer alternatives to in-person gatherings including online/drive-thru services either on their own, or in addition to in-person services. Further, the following public health guidance is provided to protect faith leaders, volunteers and members of the public who participate in places of worship:

#### **Protecting members of the public, staff and volunteers**

- Limit attendance to 30 per cent of building capacity.
- Indoor celebrations (e.g. weddings, funerals) are limited in attendance to 30 per cent of building capacity. Ceremonies taking place outdoors are limited to 50 attendees. For both indoor and outdoor ceremonies, those attending must follow proper health and safety advice, including practising physical distancing from people who are not from the same household or their established 10-person social circle. Receptions held before or after a celebration, either indoor or outdoor, are limited to 10 people.
- Maintain a distance of two metres/six feet between all persons.
- Members of the public, staff and volunteers should stay home and get tested if they feel ill with COVID-19 [symptoms](#). The use of the Province's [self-assessment tool](#) should be encouraged before coming to the place of worship.
- Maintain up-to-date contact information for staff and volunteers who attend in-person services.
- Record who is working/volunteering each day and attending group activities and events. Staff and volunteers must report illness immediately to their manager, and stay home if they are sick to [self-isolate](#).

❑ **Barrie:**  
15 Sperling Drive  
Barrie, ON  
L4M 6K9  
705-721-7520  
FAX: 705-721-1495

❑ **Collingwood:**  
280 Pretty River Pkwy.  
Collingwood, ON  
L9Y 4J5  
705-445-0804  
FAX: 705-445-6498

❑ **Cookstown:**  
2-25 King Street S.  
Cookstown, ON  
L0L 1L0  
705-458-1103  
FAX: 705-458-0105

❑ **Gravenhurst:**  
2-5 Pineridge Gate  
Gravenhurst, ON  
P1P 1Z3  
705-684-9090  
FAX: 705-684-9887

❑ **Huntsville:**  
34 Chaffey St.  
Huntsville, ON  
P1H 1K1  
705-789-8813  
FAX: 705-789-7245

❑ **Midland:**  
A-925 Hugel Ave.  
Midland, ON  
L4R 1X8  
705-526-9324  
FAX: 705-526-1513

❑ **Orillia:**  
120-169 Front St. S.  
Orillia, ON  
L3V 4S8  
705-325-9565  
FAX: 705-325-2091

- Provide information and training to workers and volunteers about appropriate physical distancing, facility-specific risk-reduction measures, and proper respiratory and hygiene practices.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to use non-medical masks if they are unable to maintain two metre physical distance from one another or congregants. Video's on how to wear a non-medical mask are provided [here](#).
- Encourage proper [respiratory etiquette](#) and [hand hygiene](#). Make hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol available at the entrances and exits of the place of worship.

#### **Facilities**

- Commonly touched surfaces (e.g. door handles, light switches, washrooms, ceremonial objects, etc.) should be frequently [cleaned and disinfected](#).
- Consider the use of one-way directional arrows for those attending services.
- Print and post signs and information at entrances and exits of the church for [screening](#) and [physical distancing](#) and [hand hygiene](#) & [respiratory etiquette](#).

#### **Higher Risk Activities**

- Since COVID-19 is spread through droplet and airborne transmission through aerosols, singing in a choir or during the service is discouraged given that singing is known to increase droplet spread. Consider the use of alternative means of music such as pre-recorded songs that can be broadcasted during the service.
- Social gatherings following services are discouraged to reduce the spread of the virus. Furthermore, provision of food and beverages before, during, or after faith-based activities or events is strongly discouraged because of the increased risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Shared items for the purposes of a service should be cleaned and sanitized before and after use. Participants in services should be encouraged to bring their own items if possible. Where cleaning and sanitizing of objects is not possible (e.g. books), these should be discouraged.
- For the purposes of donations, a central location for participants to deposit is encouraged to avoid passing of containers between individuals.
- The use of rented facilities for the general public within places of worship should follow gathering restrictions in accordance with the existing emergency orders for social gatherings (up to 10 individuals together, maintaining a physical distance of two metres apart).

The health unit will provide you with the provincial guidance document for places of worship once it is received for your distribution to places of worship in your community. It will also be placed on the health unit's webpage dedicated to COVID-19 at <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19>. In the interim, questions about this letter and best practices can be directed to our Health Connection line at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520).

Sincerely,

#### **ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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