

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

-RED CONTROL

Last revised: December 14, 2020

Given that the risk of COVID-19 transmission is greater indoors when people congregate such as in places of worship, it is important to adhere to best practices to ensure safety for people congregating in such settings. Faith community leaders/organizers are responsible for preventing the risk of infection among those who participate in their activities. This updated guidance is provided to assist places of worship in protecting against transmission of COVID-19. Effective November 7, 2020, the Province of Ontario implemented the [Keeping Ontario Safe and Open Framework](#) which guides public health restrictions based on COVID-19 transmission in the province. Changes have been made to [Ontario Regulation 263/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 2](#) under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act. Given that regulations and recommendations around COVID-19 are changing regularly, please visit the [Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's website](#) often.

PROTECTING MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS

KEY REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limit Gathering Sizes

- Virtual means of providing services are recommended (such as live streaming, drive-in, or by phone), as this is safer than having people attend services in person. Outdoor services are also considered to be a safer alternative.
- Allowable gathering size must adhere to the government of Ontario's limits for organized public events, ensuring physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) is maintained. Events cannot be combined to achieve permission for a larger gathering size.

	Gatherings for religious service, wedding or funeral services rite, or ceremonies	Social gatherings associated with weddings, funerals and other religious services, rites or ceremonies held in staffed facilities and private dwellings:
Indoor	30% of room capacity or less	5 people or less
Outdoor	100 people or less	25 people or less

Physical Distancing Measures

Everyone, except people living in the same household, must maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet). The layout of the space should be modified as required to facilitate this.

Face Coverings and Masks

- [Face coverings](#) must be worn inside the place of worship at all times, unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the face covering for services provided by the place of worship (such as eating/drinking). There are some situations when a mask or face covering is not required as per [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#). Consider providing alternative services for people who are unable to wear a face covering (e.g. virtual services).
- Face coverings should also be worn outdoors when physical distancing cannot be achieved.

Health Screening, Record Keeping, and Respiratory Etiquette

- Encourage staff, volunteers and visitors to conduct a [self-assessment](#) before coming to the place of worship and stay home if they have COVID-19 [symptoms](#), seek testing, and [self-isolate](#).
- It is required that the name and contact information of every person who enters the place of worship be recorded.
- Encourage proper [cough etiquette](#) and individuals to perform [hand hygiene](#) when entering and leaving the place of worship.
- Make 60-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer available at the entrances and exits.

Singing in the Congregation

- Singing in the congregation is strongly discouraged, even with masks. Recommendations to reduce the risk associated with performers separated from the congregation are provided later in this document.

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PHYSICAL DISTANCING MEASURES

- Assign staff or volunteers to remind of physical distancing measures in areas where people naturally gather.
- Use floor markings and signs for one-way directional movement to reduce crowding.
- Remove or tape off seats for 2 metre (6 feet) distance between visitors and alternative rows.
- Encourage visitors to remain in their designated space throughout the service.
- Avoid personal greetings such as hugs, handshakes, kissing of hands or cheeks.

SPEAKERS AND PERFORMERS SEPARATE FROM THE CONGREGATION

- It is required that speakers use a microphone instead of projecting their voice, to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets.
- Have separate microphones for each speaker or singer. Do not share. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use.
- If more than one person is singing, limit the number of people singing to the fewest possible.
- Singers and players of brass or wind instruments must be separated from any other performer by Plexiglas or some other impermeable barrier. If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be separated from any other person (outside of the same household) to the greatest extent possible (but at least 2 metres/6 feet).
- Every performer and other person who provides work for the place of worship must maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person, except, if it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal. During periods of rest in between performances, face coverings should be used.
- Other musicians using instruments that are not brass or wind (e.g. guitars) are required to use face coverings and must maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person.
- If recorded music is used, ensure the volume is not played at a level that exceeds the level at which normal conversation is possible.

RECORD KEEPING

- Maintain an attendance record of all staff, volunteers, and visitors. Include name, date, time/event, email address, or phone number. Information may be gathered beforehand if there is online registration or invitation, or collected at the entrance, either verbally or written on a sheet.
- The records must be maintained for a period of at least one month and available for disclosure to the medical officer of health.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of attendees), whichever is more frequent.
- Refer to [Public Health Ontario's Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet](#) (PDF).
- Refer to Health Canada's lists [of disinfectants for use against coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

REFERENCES

You may also refer to both the Ministry of Health's [Guidance for Meetings and Events Facilities during COVID-19](#) and [SMDHU's Guidance for Indoor and Outdoor Events and Gatherings](#), as well as the [Province's guidance documents on day camps](#) and [Early Years Guidelines](#). Places of worship are permitted to have child care during faith services; however, childcare for infants is discouraged.

This guidance has been adapted from [The Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies; Workplace Safety & Prevention Services' Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19](#),