

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS – STEP 3

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The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently at Step 3 of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#). This document provides additional guidance and clarity for faith-based organizations at Step 3, by following [Ontario Regulation 364/20 Rules for Areas at Step 3 and at the Roadmap Exit Step](#) (O. Reg. 364/20) under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Approach to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#). Limitations have been placed for religious services rites or ceremonies, including wedding services and funeral services within faith-based organizations and places of worship in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19: PROTOCOLS AND POLICES FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

SAFETY PLAN

- A [safety plan](#) must be written and available on request. A copy of the safety plan must be posted in a conspicuous location where it can be viewed by staff and patrons.
- The safety plan shall describe the implementation of public health measures in the location, including but not limited to screening, proof of vaccination verification process (where applicable), physical distancing, masks/face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment, and preventing and controlling crowds.
- Additional guidance on how to develop a safety plan can be found [here](#).

GATHERING LIMITS

- All persons attending the gathering must comply with public health guidance. More information is provided in the table and the physical distancing section below.

	Gatherings for wedding, funeral or religious services, rite or ceremonies	Social gatherings (e.g., receptions) associated with any weddings, funerals and other religious service, rite or ceremony
Indoor	NEW: The number of persons occupying any room in the building or structure while attending the gathering must be limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person in the room.	NEW: 50 people or less*
Outdoor	NEW: No gathering/capacity limit.	NEW: 100 people or less*
For guidance on social gatherings associated with any religious, wedding, or funeral service, rite or ceremony (e.g., reception) see SMDHU's guidance for organized public events and gatherings and planning a wedding checklist .		

* Exception for members of a single household, or one person from outside the household who lives alone or is a caregiver for a member of the household.

PROOF OF VACCINATION

- Faith-based organizations may opt-in (on a daily basis) to require proof of vaccination and proof of identity with an original identification document (photocopies of ID and digital versions (stored in phone) are generally not acceptable but allowed for youth aged 12-17 years) from patrons 12 years and 12 weeks of age and older, for purposes of attending a religious, wedding or funeral service, rite or ceremony, at the point of entry, with limited exemptions.

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Proof of Vaccination Opt-in Requirements and Details

- The person responsible for an indoor location where a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony takes place may elect to require attendees to provide proof of identification and of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- **NEW:** When election to opt-in has been made, the capacity limit of the particular room will be based on the Fire Code (i.e., physical distancing is not required).
- During each day when the election is in effect, the person responsible for the location:
 - Must check and verify proof of vaccination and proof of identity of all patrons 12 years and 12 weeks of age and older, at the point of entry, with limited exceptions.
 - Is required to post [signs](#) at all entrances to the room, in a conspicuous location visible to the public, that inform persons that proof of vaccination is required to enter the room.
- When a faith-based organization elects to opt-in to the proof of vaccination requirements, the following measures to strengthen the proof of vaccination system must be followed:
 - Individuals are **required** to use a digital or printed paper copy of the [enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code](#) (vaccine receipts without QR code are no longer accepted), with limited exemptions for members of nine First Nations communities and visitors from outside of Canada. See the province's [proof of vaccination guidance](#) and [question and answer resource](#) for more information.
 - The person responsible for the location is required to verify proof of vaccination by using the [Verify Ontario app](#) (visual verification is no longer acceptable).
 - It is advised not to accept physician notes as medical exemptions. Those with eligible medical or clinical trial exemptions will have access to a certificate with QR code that can be verified using the [Verify Ontario app](#).
- For guidance on social gatherings associated with any religious, wedding, or funeral service, rite or ceremony (e.g., reception) see SMDHU's [guidance for organized public events and gatherings](#) and [planning a wedding checklist](#). More information about opt-in requirements and details can be found in [O. Reg. 364/20](#), in the province's [proof of vaccination guidance](#) and [question and answer resource](#), and on SMDHU's [website](#).

SCREENING

- Every employee (e.g., staff and volunteers) who enters any area of the establishment must be [actively screened](#) before coming to the faith-based facility and follow the direction provided.
- Please see the province's [website](#) for direction on active screening employees and workers.
- Persons attending a place of worship should be encouraged to conduct passive screening prior to attendance.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- **NEW:** Physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) is required at all times (except when an election has been made to opt-in) for all staff and patrons from people they do not live with. Physical distancing is not required for those living within the same household.
- Assign staff or volunteers to remind individuals of physical distancing measures in areas where people naturally gather and monitor capacity limits.
- Use floor markings and signs for one-way directional movement to reduce crowding.
- Remove or tape off seats for 2 metres (6 feet) distance between patrons and alternative rows.
- Encourage patrons to remain in their designated space throughout the service.
- Avoid personal greetings such as hugs, handshakes, kissing of hands or cheeks.
- Individuals in line or congregating outdoors must maintain a physical distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person.
- Consider telephone counselling services when possible.
- Keep in-person services short, especially indoors.
- Consider alternative collection options such as a secure drop box or touchless offerings.
- Provide single-use handouts or ask congregants to bring their own items.

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- For rites requiring close contact wear a medical mask and eyewear or face shields. Do not share personal protective equipment.
- If offering in-person programming outside using a tent or canopy, at least two full sides must be open to the outdoors and must not be substantially blocked by any walls or other impermeable physical barriers.
- Indoor and outdoor dining is permitted with restrictions. See SMDHU's [food premises guidance document](#).

MASKS AND FACE COVERINGS

- Masks or [face coverings](#) must be worn at all times inside faith-based settings unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the mask/face covering for services provided (this includes small groups and meetings).
- It is recommended that all individuals (e.g., staff, volunteers, visitors), wear a [well-fitted](#) high quality 3-layered non-medical mask, medical mask or respirator (i.e., N95s, KN95).
- Staff and volunteers are required to wear a medical mask and approved eye protection when within 2 metres (6 feet) of someone who is not wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers that person's mouth, nose and chin.
- Removal of masks or face coverings indoors is permitted only for limited circumstances as per [O. Reg. 364/20](#).
- Consider providing alternative services for people who are unable to wear a mask/face covering (e.g., virtual services).
- Post [signage](#) that promotes wearing a mask or face covering at entrances.

SINGING, MUSICIANS AND PERFORMERS

- Adapt or suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission, which may include singing, choirs and playing wind or brass instruments. To reduce the risk:
 - Consider live streaming services.
 - Limit the number of performers and vocalists. Avoid group or congregational singing.
 - Consider alternatives to vocalists and wind instruments, such as other instruments, pre-recorded music or virtual performances.
- All performers must maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from any spectators or be separated from any spectators by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.
 - All performers should stand at least 2 metres apart from other performers and conductor.
- Length of instruments should be accounted for when determining physical distancing.
- Performers and officiant should have their own microphone. Do not share microphones.
- Officiants may remove their mask only during the service if a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) can be maintained from all others at all times.

HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the entrances and exits.
- Encourage proper [cough etiquette](#) and individuals to perform [hand hygiene](#) when entering and leaving the faith-based organization.
- Where possible, open windows and keep doors open to increase air flow.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- In addition to routine cleaning and disinfection, surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition, as well as when visibly dirty. It is recommended that such surfaces are cleaned and disinfected following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of attendees).
 - Examples of frequently touched surfaces include, but are not limited to hand contact areas, door handles, switches, tabletops, chairs, restrooms, taps, handrails, and baby change tables.
- Use only disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) given and [approved by Health Canada](#). Ensure products are not expired and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

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- Any equipment provided to or for use by staff/patrons of the faith-based organization must be cleaned and disinfected between use and as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- For equipment, use only cleaning and disinfectant products that are intended for the object.
- Remove equipment that may be difficult to clean and disinfect.
- More guidance on cleaning and disinfection is provided by [Health Canada](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).
- While the risk of COVID-19 transmission through touching surfaces is low, it does occur. It is important to continue to follow infection control measures to reduce the various ways in which COVID-19 is spread. This includes appropriate cleaning and disinfection, as well as proper hand hygiene, masking, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and immunization.

CHILD CARE OR CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Any unlicensed child care and children's programming must operate in a manner consistent with the [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Camps](#) (revised December 21, 2021).

SIGNAGE

Post signs promoting wearing masks/face coverings, self-assessments, handwashing, physical distancing, proof of vaccination, and capacity limits and make them visible to staff and patrons. [Proof of vaccination signs](#) are required to be posted on each day a premises opts-in to requiring proof of vaccination. Sample signage can be found [here](#).

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER AND OUR COMMUNITY

We understand that this is a challenging time, but public health measures like this are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19. We thank you for the service that you provide to the community.

Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Health Connection line if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

While the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit aims to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional. No one should act, or refrain from acting, based solely upon the materials provided in this guidance, any hypertext links or other general information without first seeking appropriate legal or other professional advice. Please visit the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website regularly for updates and additional guidance.