

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

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The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently in 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.

**NEW:** All businesses and organizations, including faith-based organizations and places of worship, in the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia must also adhere to the SMDHU's medical officer of health's [letter of instruction \(amended November 23, 2021\)](#), which sets out specific measures to control the spread of COVID-19 inside workplaces and public places. Faith-based settings and organizations have been specified in the list of businesses and organizations to which the letter applies.

Faith-based organizations are not required to verify proof of vaccination (i.e., proof of identity with an original identification document (copies are not acceptable) and vaccine receipt or [enhanced COVID-19 vaccine certificate with QR code](#)) from patrons 12 years of age and older attending religious services, rites, or ceremonies, including wedding services and funeral services within faith-based organizations and places of worship. Indoor gathering (capacity) limits for faith-based organizations are based on a physical distancing calculation unless the organization elects to opt-in\* to require proof of vaccination. More information about opt-in requirements and details can be found in; the gathering limits and proof of vaccination section below, [O. Reg. 364/20](#), in the province's [proof of vaccination guidance for businesses and organizations](#) and [question and answer](#) resource, and on SMDHU's [website](#).

## 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 your safety plan can be found [here](#).

### GATHERING LIMITS AND PROOF OF VACCINATION

- Indoor gathering (capacity) limits for faith-based organizations are based on a physical distancing calculation unless the organization elects to opt-in to require proof of vaccination.
- Capacity limit signage must be posted, except when the organization elects to opt-in\* to require proof of vaccination, in which case capacity is determined by the fire code.
- **NEW:** Faith-based organizations may opt-in (on a daily basis) to require proof of vaccination (i.e., proof of identity with an original identification document (copies are not acceptable) and vaccine receipt or [enhanced COVID-19 vaccine certificate with QR code](#)) from **patrons 12 years 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.
  - The opt-in does **not apply to social gatherings (e.g., receptions)** associated with religious, wedding, or funeral services, rite, or ceremony.
  - See the opt-in requirements and details section below for more information.
- 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.

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## Capacity Limits and Proof of Vaccination.

Location	Capacity Limits	Proof of Vaccination
<b>Religious, wedding, and funeral services, rites, or ceremonies</b>		
<b>Faith-Based Organizations</b>	<b>Indoors &amp; Outdoors:</b> Capacity is limited to space sufficient to ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) can be maintained (calculation †) <b>unless</b> the faith-based organization elects to opt-in to the proof of vaccination requirement. See opt-in requirements and details section for more information.	Not required; however, option to opt-in to proof of vaccination to lift capacity limits is an option. See opt-in requirements and details section for more information.
<b>For guidance on social gatherings associated with any religious, wedding, or funeral service, rite or ceremony (e.g., reception) see SMDHU's <a href="#">guidance for organized public events and gatherings</a> and <a href="#">planning a wedding checklist</a>.</b>		

† calculation to determine indoor capacity based on physical distancing: multiply the width in metres of the indoor space by the length in metres and divide by 4 to determine maximum number of congregants permitted to gather indoors.

## **NEW:** Proof of Vaccination Opt-in Requirements and Details

**Election to opt-in for proof of vaccination requirements for ceremonies associated with weddings, funerals, religious services, or rites:**

- Faith-based organizations can lift capacity limits for ceremonies associated with wedding, funeral or religious services or rites if they elect to opt-in to requiring proof of vaccination for patrons 12 years of age or older.
- During each day when the faith-based organization opts-in to the proof of vaccination requirement, the person responsible for the location in which the wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony takes place is not required to limit the number of persons in the room to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person in the room. During each day when the election is in effect, the person responsible for the location:
  - must require patrons to provide proof of vaccination (i.e., proof of identity with an original identification document (copies are not acceptable) **and** vaccine receipt or [enhanced COVID-19 vaccine certificate with QR code](#)).
  - is required to post [signs](#) at all entrances to the premises, in a conspicuous location visible to the public, that inform persons that proof of vaccination is required in order to enter the room.

## SCREENING AND RECORD KEEPING

- NEW:** Every person (e.g., visitors, 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. Screening can be done by telephone, app, questionnaire, interview, etc.
- NEW:** Faith-based organizations are required to keep an attendance record (full name and contact information – email and/or telephone number) of every person (e.g., visitors, staff and volunteers) who enter any area of the establishment. Records should include full name, date, time/ event, email address and/or phone number. Records must be maintained for at least 30 days and only be disclosed to a medical officer of health or an inspector.

## PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Individuals in line or congregating outdoors must maintain a physical distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person (regardless of whether proof of vaccination requirements are in place).
- NEW:** Physical distancing within the premises and the physical distancing guidance outlined below must be implemented if the faith-based organization does not opt-in to proof of vaccination requirements.

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- Physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) is required at all times for all staff and visitors 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 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.

## 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).
- 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 AND PERFORMING

- 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:
  - Congregational singing is strongly discouraged, even with masks. If members of the congregation are singing, they should do so with their masks on and they should be separated from anyone outside of their household by at least 2 metres, regardless of proof of vaccination requirements.
  - Consider alternatives to vocalists and wind instruments, such as other instruments, pre-recorded music, or virtual performances.
  - If live singing or use of wind instruments is performed, the performers/vocalist must maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from all others.
- 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

- Encourage proper [cough etiquette](#) and individuals to perform [hand hygiene](#) when entering and leaving the faith-based organization.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the entrances and exits.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing posters in areas that can be clearly seen around the faith-based organization. Sample signage can be found [here](#).
- 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).

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- 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.
- Limit the use of water fountains to be used only to re-fill water bottles, not for individuals to drink directly from them. Ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- Any equipment provided to or for use by staff/visitors 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.
- It is recommended to maintain logs of cleaning and disinfection.
- 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 Day Camps](#) – revised July 15, 2021 (e.g., cohorting, masking, room separation for different cohorts, etc.)

## SIGNAGE

Post signs promoting wearing masks/face coverings, handwashing, capacity limits, proof of vaccination, and physical distancing 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.*