

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

In-person gatherings for prayer and worship are [now permitted](#) with conditions described in this guidance document. Community faith leaders need to carefully consider how and when to re-establish in-person activities. There are many members who are older and/or have health conditions, which makes them more vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. This guidance document reflects the need to protect everyone from COVID-19.

Revised or updated guidance may be issued to further control the spread of infection or loosen restrictions. Please check our [website](#) periodically for updates. Checklists for specific faith community rituals and practices will also be available shortly. However, the general guidance below will still apply.

New bylaw on use of masks or face coverings

As of July 7, 2020, the use of non-medical masks or face coverings is required in all indoor public spaces, as per a new City of Toronto [bylaw](#). Faith organizations are required to develop a policy and protocols on the wearing of masks. Refer to the [guidance on mask and face covering bylaw](#) for a sample policy your organization can adapt. Train staff on the new bylaw policy and who is exempt; how to [safely wear a cloth mask](#) or face covering. More information is available [here](#).

All places of worship must adhere to the following requirements

Faith community leaders and organizers are responsible for preventing the risk of infection among staff, volunteers, community members, and visitors who participate in their organization's activities.

Suspended Services

- Communion and other close contact activities as [advised by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health](#).
- All social gatherings, including before or after the service, as [advised by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health](#).
- Food services.
- Regular childcare and children's programming.
- Indoor singing, choir service and use of wind instruments.
- Sharing and distribution of materials and objects such as books, communion objects, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, chalices.
- Use of holy water stoup/rites.
- Passing of collection/offering plates.

General Guidance

- Stay informed through our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19. Public health measures may change due to changing infection rates.

- Develop strategies to minimize exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19:
 - Conduct health screening for COVID-19 symptoms for staff, volunteers and worshipers.
 - Restrict admission to allow for ease of movement while maintaining physical distancing.
 - Use posters, floor markers and furniture to encourage everyone to maintain two metres/six feet.
 - Modify services to avoid prolonged close contact or install barriers (e.g. plexiglass).
 - Avoid activities that involve communal items or relics used in rituals or ceremonies.
 - Encourage good hand hygiene by providing hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) at the entrance.
 - Schedule frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and washrooms.
- Train staff and volunteers on required public health measures to keep everyone safe, including themselves.
- Limit indoor services to 30% of your room/building capacity to allow for physical distancing.
- Inform members how you will keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic on your organization's website, through social media, posting information, etc.

Preparation for Services

- Consider alternative ways to include members who are at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 (e.g. host virtual or drive-in services, or offer dedicated service hours).
- The organizer must ensure that the number of persons allowed in the building does not exceed 30% of the room/building/structure capacity. Calculating how many people can be accommodated while maintaining the two metre/six feet distancing may be less than a venue's posted occupancy capacity. However, children under the age of two are not counted in the number of participants allowed.
- If anticipating higher attendance than the allowable capacity, consider offering additional, smaller services.
- Consider asking the same families (social circle) to attend the same service each day/week to minimize the mixing of different individuals/families.
- Consider developing an online registration for each service and event. This may allow visitors to use the online self-assessment tool before every visit to the place of worship. However, it is also recommended that members [self-screen](#) upon arrival.
- Ensure to set up a screening station away from the entrance to avoid crowding.
- Anyone with symptom(s) of COVID-19, even if they are mild, should stay home. If they become ill during the service, they should return home immediately and [self-isolate](#).
- Remove seating, or if seating is fixed, mark or rope off a two metre/six foot distance as being unavailable between rows and seats.
- Plan a one-way route for the entryway and exit within the building to allow a two metre/six foot distance between members. Separate entrances and exits may not be necessary as participants usually enter and exit within distinct time periods.

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- Anticipate places where people will naturally gather; either outside, in a hallway or foyer, and assign staff or volunteers to remind members about physical distancing.
- Ensure all water systems (e.g. drinking fountains, taps) are safe to use after a prolonged building shutdown to minimize risk of diseases associated with stagnant water. If drinking fountains are available, ensure they are used safely and frequently cleaned and disinfected throughout the service.
- Develop and implement a schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfecting. Allow for adequate cleaning and disinfecting of prayer and high traffic areas between services.
- Public health will advise of any additional cleaning and disinfecting measures needed to reduce the risk of spread in the setting.

COVID-19 Outbreaks and Contact Tracing

- Consider collecting the date, names and contact information (phone number and/or email address) of the staff, volunteers, members and visitors who attended your services. This will support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee tests positive or an outbreak is identified. Providing information is voluntary for attendees. Your organization must obtain a person's consent and inform them of the purpose and legal authority for collecting this information. Your organization must make reasonable security arrangements to protect the personal information you collect.
- Any personal information that is collected for COVID-19 contract tracing can only be used for this purpose, unless an individual provides their consent. Records should only be kept for 30 days, and then shredded.
- Toronto Public Health will use this list to notify and provide instructions for close contacts to self-isolate or self-monitor for [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
- Options for collecting information include keeping a copy of any online registration, having someone observe and record names, having members sign in through a safe method (i.e. do not provide a pen that can be passed between people), or providing a list of members to Toronto Public Health upon request.

Establish Policies for Health Screening of Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers must inform their faith community leader, and stay home if they are sick and/or unwell. Staff and volunteers must be [screened](#) before starting their duties. Individuals who become ill while in the building must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). They can contact Telehealth Ontario, their health care provider or a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#) for more information and guidance about testing.

Training

- Staff and volunteers should use a mask/face covering at all times while providing services.
- Instruct staff and volunteers on proper hand hygiene techniques and respiratory etiquette, when to use masks, the [proper use of mask](#), and how to clean or discard single use masks appropriately.

Print and Post Signs

- The [COVID-19 health assessment](#) sign should be posted at all entrances.
- Anyone with [COVID-19 symptoms](#), or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 is not permitted to enter.
- [Mandatory mask or face covering](#), [Handwashing](#), [respiratory etiquette](#), [hand sanitizer](#) and [how to safely wear a mask](#) signs should be posted in high visibility areas. Note: young children should be supervised when using hand sanitizer.

During Services

- Remind members and visitors who become ill or experience symptoms of COVID-19 while in the building that they must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). They can call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider, or a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#) for guidance about testing.
- Modify all activities during the service to ensure that there is a two metre/six foot distance between leaders, staff, volunteers and visitors at all times.
- Children should remain with their parents. Exclusive children's activities should be suspended.
- Members and visitors should be informed of the new policy for mandatory use of mask when indoors. [Cloth masks can be made](#) with household items such as a T-shirt, bedsheet, or a bandana. Physical distancing is still required even when using a mask.
- Avoid any physical contact with others from different households. Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave.
- Rituals involving close physical contact (e.g. baptism, circumcision) or shared items (e.g. chalices, utensils, plates, receptacles and washing facilities) are strongly discouraged at this time. If rituals involving close physical contact must be performed use the appropriate personal protective equipment.
- In lieu of collection plates, consider a designated area for donations using e-transfer, debit or credit card tap machines.
- Promote good [respiratory etiquette](#) by coughing or sneezing into the elbow or use a tissue then discard tissue in waste bin. Wash or sanitize hands afterwards.
- Avoid use of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize or disinfect.
- Do not distribute or share items that cannot be cleaned and sanitized before and after use (e.g. books, hymns, prayer mats).
- Use printed service leaflets and discard after the service, or use projection or audio-visual systems.

Singing and Playing Musical Instruments

- Singing, loud speech or the use of wind instruments can generate aerosol and respiratory droplets which may travel further than two metres/six feet. Indoor singing and the use of wind instruments (flutes, clarinets, saxophones, trumpets, or horns) is suspended, as directed by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health. Consider pre-recording the music and playing it during the service.

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- If multiple non-wind instruments are being played, ensure physical distancing between musicians unless they are from the same household.
- Do not share microphones. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use.

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Educate staff on the proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact times (amount of time that the product will need to remain wet on a surface to achieve disinfection). Understand safety precautions and requirement for use of mask and gloves.
- Ensure adequate ventilation when using products (e.g. open windows, doors, or use fans).
- Ensure ventilation systems are operating properly, and replace filters as scheduled or sooner.
- Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces (e.g. toilets, sinks, door handles, light switches, remote controls, and microphones) twice a day or more, and when visibly dirty.
- Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towels.
- Antibacterial soap is not required to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Disinfectant kills germs on surfaces. Remove surface dirt first in order for the disinfectant to work.
- Most regular household cleaning products are effective at eliminating the virus.
- Look for cleaning and disinfectant products with an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada. Check the expiry dates of products and always follow manufacturer's instructions. Keep products away from children.
- Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces, and according to the manufacturer's instructions. Alternatively, prepared daily [fresh bleach solution](#) may be used for disinfection.
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning the setting.

Note: Disinfectant wipes may have a combined cleaning and disinfectant in one solution, but depending on how dirty the surface is it may need to be pre-cleaned as disinfectants may become ineffective when dirt is present. Check instructions on the product's label.

Drive-in Religious Gatherings

- Only members of the same household should be in the same vehicle.
- Discourage people from leaving their vehicles during the service, except when using the washroom.
- Vehicles must be parked two metres/six feet apart or more. Discourage idling the engines.
- No more than five people can conduct the service at one time from outside a vehicle, and they must stay at least two metres/six feet apart from each other.
- If faith community leaders, staff or volunteers are to approach a vehicle to provide service to its occupants, everyone is encouraged to wear a mask.

Weddings and Funerals

The maximum number of participants for weddings, funerals or other ceremonies in a place of worship, is still based on 30% of the room/building capacity or 100 people for outdoor services. The above requirements still apply, including suspending social gatherings before or after the service, and not providing food services.

Other Businesses on Premises

Places of worship that offer free or rented spaces to other groups or businesses must abide by the [emergency orders](#) of the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, and all applicable public health [guidance documents](#).

More information

For more information, visit toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References

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