

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies

Version 1 – June 15, 2020

This advice provides basic information only. It is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance for the delivery/provision of a religious service, rite or ceremony or the operation of places of worship. It also is not intended to provide, nor does it replace, medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, or legal advice.

All religious services, rites, and ceremonies must adhere to [O. Reg 52/20](#).

In the event of any conflict between this document and any emergency orders or directives issued by the Minister of Health or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the emergency order or directive prevails.

Advice for Health and Safety

- Consider using multiple communication mechanisms (signage, verbal, pre-recorded messages) to remind individuals about:
 - [COVID-19 symptoms](#);
 - The importance of [physical distancing](#) while at the service, rite or ceremony, or place of worship;
 - The importance of frequent and proper [hand hygiene](#);
 - Respiratory etiquette – promote appropriate covering of coughs and sneezes (i.e., coughing into sleeves and not hands, or using a tissue followed by performing hand hygiene) and;
 - Avoid touching face with unwashed hands.
- Manage the flow of individuals to prevent crowding and maintain 2 metre separation of individuals, especially at entrances, exits, and restrooms.

- At the entrance to the place of worship and every room (as applicable), ensure that alcohol-based hand rub is available with greater than 60% alcohol and all individuals should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene.
- Cohort individuals and families. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different individuals/families.
- Ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres between all individuals not in the same household. Consider clear markings on floors or furniture to promote physical distancing.
- It is recommended that all individuals wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge or not possible.
- Encourage individuals to avoid facing each other even if 2 metres apart.
- Suspend activities that increase risk of disease transmission, including:
 - Indoor singing activities or choir service (for outdoor singing activities and choir service, ensure physical distancing);
 - Social gatherings before or after in-person services, including those where food and drink are shared;
 - Sharing or distributing materials or objects, which may include but is not limited to: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, etc.; and
 - Regular childcare and children's programming.
- Protect vulnerable individuals, especially those over 70, those who are immuno-compromised, etc. To support this, places of worship may:
 - Recommend vulnerable individuals take part in virtual or drive-in services; and
 - Offer a dedicated service for them.

- Clean and disinfect, at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of worshippers), whichever is higher, frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces most likely to become contaminated include, but are not limited to, doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons, water fountain/cooler knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, ceremonial objects, electronic devices, and tabletops. Refer to [PHO's Environmental Cleaning fact sheet](#):
 - Only use cleaning and disinfectant products that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN); it should be stated on product packaging. Low-level hospital grade disinfectants may be used; and
 - Checking expiry dates of cleaning and disinfectant products used and always following the manufacturer's instructions. Ensure that the product used are compatible with the item to be cleaned and disinfected.

Advice for Screening

- All individuals, including children, should be screened upon arrival, prior to entry, each day they attend services. Deny entry to any individual who:
 - Has any of the symptoms outlined in the [COVID-19 symptoms](#) on the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 website.
 - Has come in close contact with a person with symptoms of COVID-19 or who has come in close contact of a confirmed case COVID-19, in the past 14 days.
 - Has travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days.
- [Post signage](#) on the entry door and throughout the organization to prompt anyone to self-identify if they feel unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, or been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

- Consider keeping a record of all individuals who attend services or enter the facility (including names, contact information, dates and times), which may help support case and contact tracing in the event of an outbreak.

Resources

- Refer to [Public Health Ontario](#) for fact sheets on:
 - Self-assessment
 - How to self-isolate
 - Physical distancing
 - How to wash your hands
 - Cleaning and disinfection
- Refer to [How Ontario is responding to COVID-19 webpage](#) for general information.
- Refer to the [Ministry of Health \(MOH\) COVID-19 webpage](#) for Guidance Documents and the [Directives, Memorandums and Other Resources webpage](#) regularly for up-to-date directives on COVID-19.