

## COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship



Toronto is currently in lockdown (**Grey Zone under the provincial [COVID-19 Response Framework](#)**). Religious services, rites, ceremonies and related celebrations must comply with the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). During this time, it is recommended that faith leaders limit in-person services to keep everyone safe.



**Host Virtual Services** to allow everyone to participate.



**Limit Gathering** for physical distancing & better ventilation.



**Monitor Proximity** for physical distancing & wear a mask.



**Limit Duration** when people are together indoors.

### 1. Conduct Virtual Services

- Toronto Public Health strongly encourages virtual services at this time to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and to ensure that everyone can participate safely.
- Many of the COVID-19 cases are from in-person transmission. Call or connect virtually with vulnerable individuals or people who live alone.

### 2. Limit Gatherings

- There have been multiple COVID-19 outbreaks linked to weddings and funeral receptions.
- If gatherings are necessary, keep services short, and plan for very small groups of people.
- Discourage social gatherings before or after the service, including staff.
- Consider postponing receptions to a later date, or limit to household members only.
- Religious services, rites and ceremonies, as well as [social events](#) before or after, must adhere to the gathering limits listed below.
- The mandatory capacity limits below include parishioners, officiants and staff. In addition, all individuals must be able to maintain at least two metres/six feet physical distancing from people they do not live with at all times.

	<b>Gatherings for weddings, funeral, or religious services, rites, or ceremonies</b>	<b>Social gatherings associated with any wedding, funeral, or religious service, rite, or ceremony</b>
<b>Indoor</b>	10 people or less, per service, rite or ceremony	None permitted.*  (*Exception for members of a single household or one person from outside the household of a person that lives alone.)
<b>Outdoor</b>	10 people or less, per service, rite or ceremony	10 people or less

### 3. Communicate

- Update staff and attendees on the new restrictive measures.
- Encourage everyone to download the [COVID Alert app](#).
- Print and [display relevant posters](#) by entrances, hallways, washrooms and meeting rooms.



### 4. Safety Plan

- Operators are required to prepare and make available a [safety plan](#). This safety plan must:
  - Be available on or before November 30, 2020.
  - Describe measures/procedures that have been or will be implemented in the organization to reduce spread of COVID-19.
  - Include measures for screening, physical distancing, masks, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, and the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE).
  - Be in writing and made available to any person for review on request.
  - Be posted in a visible place to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.

### 5. Health screening

- Staff and volunteers must [be screened for symptoms of COVID-19](#) before every shift or event.
- Post the [COVID-19 screening](#) online and at entrances to encourage visitors to self-screen.
- Anyone feeling unwell should stay home, even if the symptoms are mild.

### 6. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Provide hand sanitizer stations by entrances, and in high traffic areas.
- Encourage handwashing with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching face with unwashed hands.



- Cover cough or sneeze into your sleeve or with a tissue.
- Do not use gloves as a substitute for hand hygiene.
- Top up supplies of liquid hand soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, and tissues.



## 7. Wear a mask

- Everyone should wear a mask indoors, with some exceptions.
- Learn more about mask bylaw are under [Orders & Bylaws](#).
- Develop your own policy on masks. See sample mask policy under [Guidance on Mask and Face Covering Bylaw](#).
- Train staff on the mask bylaw and your organization's policy, including who is exempt and how to [safely wear a cloth mask](#) or face covering. Masks are not required for children under the age of two and people with trouble breathing.
- Some people who cannot wear a mask, are exempted from the bylaw. Proof of exemption is not required. Consider providing alternatives for people who are unable to wear a mask (e.g. virtual services, specific timed services).
- A mask should be worn outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained.



## 8. Physical distancing measures

- Limit attendance and modify rooms / hallways to allow for physical distancing.
- Use floor markings and signs for one directional movement to reduce crowding.
- Anticipate areas where people will naturally gather (e.g. outside, hallway, foyer). Assign staff or volunteers to remind everyone about physical distancing.
- Remove or tape off seats and alternative rows for two metre distancing between attendees.
- Consider seating by households and encourage everyone to remain seated for the service.
- Have ushers to manage seating, and exit the room row by row.

## 9. Modify or suspend activities to reduce virus spread

- Consider live streaming services services.
- Consider drive-in or telephone counselling services, when possible.
- Keep in-person services short, especially indoors.
- Avoid use of items that requires contact by multiple people, such as chalice, holy water stoup, washing facilities, prayer books, cushions, shawls, prayer rugs, etc.
- Consider alternative collection options such as a secure drop box or touch-less offerings.
- Provide single-use handouts or ask congregants to bring their own items.
- If sharing work equipment such as phones and computers, clean and disinfect between users.

- Leave distribution materials/objects on a table for people to pick up.
- For rites requiring close contact (e.g. baptism, circumcision), wear a medical mask, eyewear or face shields. Do not share personal protective equipment.
- Use a microphone instead of speaking loudly. Do not share. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use.

## 10. Drive-in services

- Vehicles should only include members of the same household.
- Encourage people to stay in their vehicles, except to use the washroom.
- Ensure vehicles are parked at least two metres/six feet apart.
- Encourage drivers to turn off their car engines to reduce exhaust from idling.
- Refer to [Guidance for Drive-in/Drive-through Events](#).

## 11. Vocalists, musicians and performers

Indoor group singing, dancing and use of wind instruments has been linked to numerous outbreaks in multiple countries. Consider avoiding risks, with alternative options.

- Limit the number of performers or vocalists. Avoid group or congregational singing.
- Use pre-recorded music (audio/ video), or use alternative musical instruments.
- Install barriers, such as plexiglass between performers and attendees. Clean and disinfect barriers after each use.
- There is limited evidence to determine an exact safe distance between singers and others, but greater distance should be taken to reduce the risk.
- All performers should stand at least two metres apart from other performers, conductor and attendees, at all times. Length of instruments should be accounted for when determining physical distancing between performers.


## 12. Attendance Record for Contact Tracing

- Keep 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. If collecting information at the entrance, maintain physical distance and do not pass pen and paper around.
- Personal information collected can only be used for contract tracing and should be kept in locked drawer or office for 30 days, and then shredded.

### 13. Plans in the Event of Illness

- Develop a plan in the event someone becomes sick while in your place of worship.
- Have a room where the person can be isolated until they can go home safely or receive medical attention.
- Have personal protective equipment (medical mask, gloves, gown, face shield) available.

### 14. Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Refer to [cleaning and disinfecting](#) fact sheet for instructions.
- Assign staff or volunteers to clean and disinfect at least twice daily. 
- Keep a cleaning log to track activities.
- Wash garments and linens after use, at the hottest temperature setting possible.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter instead of sweeping floors.
- Line the waste bins with plastic bags and empty waste bins often.
- Change gloves when changing tasks, or more often as necessary.
- Wash hands with soap and water after taking off gloves.
- Always read the labels. Avoid mixing cleaning agents. Use in a well ventilated area.

### 15. Heating, Ventilation And Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

- Maximize outdoor air ratio of the HVAC settings, or open windows and doors, where possible.
- Ensure the HVAC system(s) are properly maintained.
- Use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Do not obstruct HVAC inlets and outlets.
- Keep seating and activities away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- Use an upward airflow rotation, when using ceiling fans.
- Position fan upward to avoid blowing at people and surfaces, if using portable fans.
- If using portable air purifiers, follow the manufacturer's directions to decide where best to place the device. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on maintenance.
- Refer to the [COVID-19: Transmission, Aerosols and Ventilation](#) factsheet for more information.

### 16. Childcare or Children's Programs

Childcare for infants is discouraged. Childcare or children's programming, must comply with [COVID-19 Guidance for Day Camps](#) and [Early Years Guidelines](#).

## 17. Additional Resources

- Ministry of Health [COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)
- [Checklist for Planning a Funeral Reception / Celebration of Life during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Checklist for Planning a Wedding](#)
- [COVID-19 Workplace Guidance for Employers](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Indoor & Outdoor Events & Gatherings](#)

## More information



Provincial orders under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) and [guidance for religious services, rites or ceremonies](#) may change. Please visit [toronto.ca/COVID-19](https://toronto.ca/COVID-19) regularly for updates or call us at 416-338-7600.