

## COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

In-person gatherings for prayer and worship are now permitted with the certain conditions, as described in this guidance document. Faith community leaders should carefully consider how and when to re-establish face-to-face activities. Some faith communities may have many members who are older and/or have chronic medical conditions, and it is strongly recommended that provisions be made to enable them to participate in a safe manner. You may wish to continue with online services, either on their own, or in addition to in-person services.

All religious services, rites, and ceremonies must adhere to the appropriate emergency orders under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#), particularly [Ontario Regulation 364/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 3](#).

This guidance reflects the current need for protection from COVID-19 in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) region. As the spread of infection is brought under further control, revised guidance will be issued. Please also review the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#).

### Gathering Limits

	Religious service, rite or ceremony	Staffed event/social gathering <sup>b</sup> at a facility/business <sup>c</sup>	Private event/social gathering at a private home setting <sup>d</sup>
<b>Indoor</b>	30 per cent capacity of any particular room in a building or structure, or less	50 people or less	10 people or less
<b>Outdoor</b>	100 people or less <sup>a</sup>	100 people or less	25 people or less
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All gatherings limits are subject to the ability to maintain at least two metres physical distancing.</b></li> <li>• <b>Indoor and outdoor events and gatherings cannot be merged together to increase the total capacity limits.</b></li> </ul>			

<sup>a</sup> Includes organized religious services in private backyards. Social gatherings before or after this type of service are limited to 25 people or less outdoors or 10 people indoors.

<sup>b</sup> Includes social activities before and/or after service, receptions with food after service etc., and may be planned or spontaneous.

<sup>c</sup> Includes businesses and facilities operating in accordance with [O. Reg. 364/20](#) (e.g. places of worship, restaurants, bars, cinemas, gyms, and recreational sporting or performing art events).

<sup>d</sup> Includes unstaffed businesses or facilities (e.g. private residences, backyards, parks, and other recreation areas). See [COVID-19 Guidance Checklist for Special Events & Gatherings](#) for more information.

All places of worship must adhere to the following requirements and recommendations:

- On September 18, 2020 at 12:01am, the [Section 22 Class Order](#) requires that face coverings be worn in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings. Face coverings must be worn in all indoor areas accessible to members of the public, including but not limited to congregation areas, public washrooms, meeting rooms, and lobbies.
- The [Section 22 Class Order](#) also requires that alcohol-based hand rub be available at all entrances and exits for the use of all persons entering or exiting all churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings.
- Participation of **religious services** is limited to no more than **30% capacity of the indoor premises** or **100 attendees** if being held outdoors.
- Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends adapting or suspending activities that increase the risk of disease transmission, including:
  - **Organized staffed social events/gatherings a facility/business** (including places of worship) before or after in-person services, including those where food and drink are served. If you choose to host a social gathering (e.g. reception) for the purposes of a wedding, funeral, religious service, rite or ceremony, physical distancing is required and it must not exceed current gathering limits of more than **50 people indoors** or **100 people outdoors**.
  - Private events/social gatherings at a **private home setting** before or after in-person services. If you choose to host a gathering at a private residence, it must not exceed current gathering limits of more than **10 people indoors** or **25 people outdoors**.
  - Singing, choirs and playing wind or brass instruments.
  - Sharing or distributing of materials or objects such as: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, chalices, collection plates (please note: this is not an exhaustive list).
    - Regular childcare or children's programming. Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- Protect vulnerable individuals, especially those over 70+ years old and those who have chronic medical conditions.
- Maintain a distance of two metres/six feet between all people, as much as possible.
- Avoid opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly through surfaces and objects, including objects that may be used in rituals or ceremonies.

- Perform more frequent and enhanced cleaning and disinfection.

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

## Preparation for Services

- Consider adding COVID-19 information to your organization's website.
- Consider alternative ways to include individuals who are at greater risk of serious consequences from COVID-19.
  - To support your members that are 70+ years old and/or have chronic medical conditions, it is recommended that virtual or drive-in services be made available. Holding an exclusive and dedicated service for vulnerable individuals may also be an option.
- Plan how to ensure physical distancing (two metres/six feet) by calculating 30% of the capacity of the available space. This is the maximum number of participants allowed. The reduced capacity number includes all participants except children under two years of age.
- If the calculated reduced seating capacity (30%) is less than the anticipated number of attendees, consider creating a new schedule of services to provide more, but smaller, services.
- Cohort (i.e. group) individuals and families. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize the potential impact of mixing different individuals/families.
- Consider developing a system to RSVP planned attendance to specific services or events. This may be an opportunity to also pre-screen, however, it is also recommended that members self-screen upon arrival.
- 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 how to manage entry and exit within your building to create a two metre/six foot distance between members.
  - If it is anticipated that crowds will form outside or in a vestibule, consider having two metre/six foot distance markings on the ground, and someone to manage the crowd and remind members about physical distancing while entering and exiting.
- Separate entrances and exits may not be necessary as participants usually enter and exit within distinct time periods.

- As per the [Section 22 Class Order](#), alcohol-based hand rub (60-90% alcohol concentration) must be available at all entrances and exits to help encourage hand hygiene when entering and leaving.
- Ensure all water systems (e.g. drinking fountains, taps) are safe to use after a [prolonged facility shutdown](#) to minimize risk of diseases associated with stagnant water. If drinking fountains are available, limit their use to refilling water bottles (not drinking directly from) and ensure they are 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.

## Screening and Contact Tracing

- All individuals, including children, should be screened upon arrival, prior to entry, each day they attend services. Set up a screening station away from the entrance to avoid crowding. In addition, encourage members and visitors to use the [online self-assessment tool](#) or another similar [assessment tool](#) before every visit to the place of worship. Deny entry to any individual who:
  - Has any [COVID-19 Symptoms](#).
  - 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.
- If anyone has even one symptom of COVID-19, they should get tested and stay home or return home.
- Consider creating a list of the names and contact information (phone number and/or email) of the staff, volunteers, members and visitors that attend your services in the event there is a case of COVID-19 who was contagious while attending services. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health will use that list to notify and provide instructions to self-isolate or self-monitor for [COVID-19 Symptoms](#).
  - Options include keeping a record of online RSVPs, 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 upon request.
- Follow Public Health recommendations for cleaning and disinfection to reduce the risk of spread in the setting.

## ***Establish Policies for Health Screening of Staff and Volunteers***

If applicable, 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. Persons who become ill must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). Advise person to visit an [assessment centre](#) to be tested. Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider or Public Health for more information.

## **Training**

Instruct staff and volunteers on proper [hand hygiene](#) techniques and respiratory etiquette, when to use masks, [how to wear a mask](#), and how to clean or discard single use masks appropriately.

## **Print and Post Signs**

- COVID-19 self-screening signs should be posted at all entrances.
  - [Should you get tested for COVID-19?](#)
  - [Business friendly sign](#)
- Anyone with [COVID-19 Symptoms](#), or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 is not permitted to enter.
- [Hand washing](#), [face covering](#), [physical distancing](#) signs should be posted in high visibility areas.

## **During Services**

- Remind members and visitors who become ill or experience symptoms of COVID-19 that they must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). Advise person to visit an [assessment centre](#) to be tested. Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, their health care provider or Public Health for more information.
- 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 or adapted. Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- The [Section 22 Class Order](#) requires face coverings to be worn in all indoor public spaces in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith settings. Visitors can bring their own non-medical face coverings.

- [Non-medical cloth face coverings](#) can be made with household items such as a T-shirt or bedsheet, or a bandana may be used. Physical distancing is still required even when using a face covering.
- A leader or designated member who is speaking during a religious service/ceremony may temporarily remove their face covering for the purposes of public speaking where sufficient distance (at least two metres/six feet) is provided between the speaker(s) and participants. The leader or designated speaker must continue to wear a face covering when in a public area during a service/ceremony.
- Avoid any physical contact with others from different households.
  - Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave. For example, upon arrival, during exchange of the Peace, or at the end of services.
- Rituals involving close physical contact (e.g. baptism, circumcision) or shared items (e.g. chalices, utensils, plates, receptacles, washing facilities) are strongly discouraged at this time.
  - If rituals involving close physical contact must be performed, considerations need to be made to perform them safely such as use of appropriate personal protective equipment.
- The use of holy water rites/stoups is not recommended.
- In lieu of collection/offering plates consider a designated touchless area to offer donations or use online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines.
- Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with hand sanitizer stations (60-90% alcohol concentration). Young children should be supervised when using hand sanitizer.
  - Promote good [respiratory etiquette](#). Cover the mouth and nose with elbow when coughing or sneezing or use a tissue then discard tissue in waste bin. Wash or sanitize hands afterwards.
- Avoid use of items that are difficult to clean or disinfect.
  - Do not hand out 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.
- If any materials or objects are shared or distributed:
  - Ensure that hand hygiene is performed prior to distribution or sharing.
  - Consider leaving objects or materials on a table for individuals to pick-up.

- Limit the number of individuals who have contact with the materials or objects.
- Ensure any materials or objects returned are cleaned and disinfected or not used immediately.
- Do not share microphones. Clean and disinfect microphones according to manufacturer's instructions after each use.

## Singing and Instrumental Music

- Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singings or wind or brass instrumental music.
- Group singing or singing by the congregation as a whole is strongly discouraged even if masks/face coverings are being worn by staff, volunteers and attendees.
- Singing or playing wind or brass instruments is permitted by an officiant, singer(s)/choir/performer if the following are in place:
  - Singers and players of wind and brass instruments should be separated from any spectators and/or the congregation by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier and remain separated from others outside their household or social circle by at least two metres.
  - If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person.
- In the event the officiant, singer(s)/choir/performer or designated member is singing or playing a wind or brass instrument, face coverings may be temporarily removed if singers are separated from each other and the congregation by at least two metres. If sufficient physical distancing (at least two metres) between the singer and the congregation is not possible, an impermeable barrier should be provided.

## 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.
- Cleaning and disinfectant products should have 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 the 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, chlorine bleach solutions may be used for disinfection.
  - Prepare fresh bleach solution daily.
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning the setting.
- See resource for [cleaning and disinfection for public settings](#).

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

- It is recommended that only members of the same household or social circle are together in one vehicle.
- People attending the gathering, other than the persons conducting the service, rite or ceremony, must remain in their vehicles during the service, except when necessary to use a washroom or for health and safety purposes.
- Vehicles must be parked two metres/six feet apart or more. Discourage the idling of engines.
- 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, Funerals, Religious Service, Rite or Ceremony

- The above requirements and recommendations apply to weddings, funerals, religious services, rites or ceremonies.
- All people attending the gathering must remain at least two metres/six feet apart from each other, and from the persons conducting the wedding, funeral, service, rite or ceremony, unless they are members of the same household or social circle.
- Gathering limits described on page 1 of this document apply to weddings, funerals, religious service, rite and ceremony.

## 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 our website at [www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca](http://www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca) or call us at 519-822-2715 ext. 4020 (for non-health related questions) or ext. 7006 (health-related questions).

[Ministry of Health Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)

Also see the *Ontario Government's* [Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3](#).

## References

Toronto Public Health (2020). *COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship*. Retrieved on June 23, 2020 from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/978e-COVID-19-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship.pdf>

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