

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

The following guidance is intended to support operators of places of worship to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Religious services, rites, ceremonies, related celebrations and other activities held at a place of worship must comply with the [Reopening Ontario Act](#).

Toronto Public Health encourages virtual and outdoor religious services in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Indoor religious gatherings are permitted subject to applicable limits.

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals and businesses with information related to the Ontario Government’s reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim 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. The full Ontario re-opening regulations for Step 3 are [available online](#).



Encourage or require COVID-19 vaccination



Host virtual or outdoor services



Limit indoor gatherings & their duration



Monitor proximity



Ensure masks are worn

1. Encourage or Require Vaccination

- Encourage staff, volunteers and visitors who are age 5 and older to get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. See [Vaccine Information for Faith-based Organizations](#) for more information.
- Vaccination requirements will further reduce the risk for all participants.
- Read and share information [about the vaccine and where to get vaccinated](#).
- Post signs and share [COVID-19 vaccine resources](#), available in multiple languages.

2. Conduct Virtual or Outdoor Services

- During the pandemic, there have been multiple COVID-19 outbreaks linked to weddings and funeral receptions.
- Keep religious gatherings as short as possible, and limit the number of people.
- Toronto Public Health strongly encourages virtual or outdoor options to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and to ensure that everyone can participate safely.

3. Limited Gatherings are Permitted

- Religious services, ceremonies and rites are permitted within places of worship with restrictions on capacity.
- All individuals must be able to maintain at least two metres physical distancing from people they do not live with at all times.

Wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony

- **Indoors:** The number of persons occupying any room must not exceed 50 per cent of the capacity of the particular room.
- **Outdoors:** Limited to the number of people that can maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person.

Social gathering associated with a wedding, funeral or religious service, rite or ceremony

- **Indoors:** 5 people or less
- **Outdoors:** 10 people or less
- *If held in a meeting and event space, subject to applicable requirements. See [guidance for events and gatherings](#) for more information.

Toronto Public Health strongly discourages multiple indoor services being held at the same time and asks that Toronto's places of worship do their part in helping to reduce the spread of the **very contagious and severe variants** of COVID-19.

4. 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.

5. Safety Plan

- It is strongly recommended that places of worship prepare a written safety plan that:

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- Describes measures/procedures that have been or will be implemented in the organization to reduce spread of COVID-19.
- Includes measures for screening, physical distancing, masks, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) and preventing and controlling crowding.
- Is posted in a visible place to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.
- Use the [COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist](#) to develop your safety plan.

6. Health screening

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

7. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Provide hand sanitizer stations by entrances, and in high traffic areas.
- Top up supplies of liquid hand soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, and tissues.
- 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.



8. Wear a mask

- Everyone must wear a mask indoors, with some exceptions.
- Learn more about the City of Toronto mask bylaw under [Orders & Bylaws](#).
- Develop your own policy on masks. See [sample mask policy](#).
- 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.



9. Physical distancing measures

- All people must maintain at least a two metres [physical distance](#) from others they don't live with.
- 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.

10. Modify or suspend activities to reduce virus spread

- Consider live streaming services.
- Consider telephone counselling services, when possible.
- Offer in-person programming outdoors whenever possible.
 - If using a tent or canopy, at least two full sides must be open to the outdoors and not substantially blocked by any walls or other impermeable barriers.
 - Limit capacity under the tent/canopy to encourage physical distancing.
 - Arrange tables and chairs to promote physical distancing.
 - Require masks or face coverings if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Keep in-person services short, especially indoors.
- Avoid use of items that require 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 and 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.

11. Vocalists, musicians and performers

Indoor group singing, dancing and use of wind instruments has been linked to numerous outbreaks in multiple countries. Avoid risks by considering alternative options.

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- Limit the number of performers or vocalists. Avoid group or congregational singing.
- Use pre-recorded music (audio/ video), or use alternative musical instruments.
- Performers must maintain at least two metres distance from any spectators or be separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier. Clean and disinfect barriers after each use.
- All performers should stand at least two metres apart from other performers and conductor.
- Length of instruments should be accounted for when determining physical distancing.

12. Food and Drink

- Indoor dining is not permitted. See [Guidance for Food Premises](#) for more information.

13. 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.

14. 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 (e.g. medical mask, gloves, gown, face shield) available.
- Operators must immediately notify Toronto Public Health via the [Workplace Reporting Tool](#) as soon as they become aware of two or more employees who test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day interval in connection with the place of worship.

15. Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Refer to [cleaning and disinfecting](#) fact sheet for instructions.
- Assign staff or volunteers to clean and disinfect as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- 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.



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- 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.

16. 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.

17. Childcare or Children's Programs

Childcare / children's programming must comply with [COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Settings](#).

18. 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](#)
- [Guidance on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Indoor & Outdoor Events & Gatherings](#)
- [Ontario Public Health Measures and Advice](#)

More information



Provincial orders under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) and [guidance for religious services, rites or ceremonies](#) may change. Please visit toronto.ca/COVID19 regularly for updates or call us at 416-338-7600.