COVID-19: PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

This document provides guidance on the prevention and management of COVID-19 in places of worship. Places of worship are any space dedicated to religious services, including churches, cathedrals, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith-based spaces.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, this guidance is subject to change. Please visit york.ca/covid19 regularly for updates and additional guidance.

Planning Advice

- Effective March 28, 2020, the Government of Ontario has prohibited organized public events and social gatherings of more than 5 people. This includes weddings, social gatherings, and communal services within places of worship
  - Funerals are permitted to proceed with up to 10 people at one time
- If you decide to remain open for other small events (gatherings of five or less people, funerals with up to 10 people), York Region Public Health recommends that all persons be screened for symptoms and a history of any international travel that may be related to COVID-19

Active screening

- At each event, all attendees and staff should be asked the following questions upon arrival. Anyone who answers “Yes” to one or both of these questions should be advised that they cannot attend. Those who answer “No” to both questions are eligible to attend
  1. Do you have any of the following symptoms: fever, cough or difficulty breathing?
  2. Have you travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days?
- Screening posters available at york.ca/covid19 under the Resources heading

Infection prevention and control strategies

- Avoid activities which require close contact (hand-shaking, hugging) or sharing items (drinking from chalice, passing collection basket, passing candle, kissing sacred items)
- Encourage attendees to practice good respiratory etiquette (sneezing/coughing into tissue or elbow) and hand hygiene (frequent hand washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer)
- Avoid preparing and distributing food and beverages. If food or beverages will be offered, implement measures to minimize the number of people who have contact with food, beverages, and serving utensils
- Avoid drinking from water fountains
- In addition to standard cleaning protocols, clean and disinfect high touch surfaces throughout the day, and as needed
Advice for essential public gatherings

- In advance of the public gathering, develop and implement a COVID-19 plan that considers the following:
  - Processes to isolate those who may become ill during the public gathering
  - Measures to enhance physical distancing (two meters) and avoid crowding throughout the gathering
  - Measures to minimize the likelihood of transmission during activities and meals
  - Enhanced infection prevention and control measures, such as the availability of hand sanitizer and hand washing facilities
  - Enhanced environmental cleaning measures, such as regularly cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces
  - A mechanism to alert potential attendees who have symptoms or have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days to avoid the event

- Passive screening signage should be posted to alert those who have symptoms or who have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days to go home
  - Screening posters available at york.ca/covid19 under the Resources heading

- In addition to standard cleaning protocols, clean and disinfect high touch surfaces throughout the day, and as needed
  - Cleaning and disinfection guidance available at york.ca/covid19 under the Resources heading

Management of individuals who develop symptoms of possible COVID-19

- Separate individuals who show symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, difficulty breathing) immediately from others in a supervised area until the person can go home
- If someone is seriously ill and in need of immediate medical attention, call 911
- If possible, anyone who assists a person who is symptomatic should maintain a distance of two meters from that person. If this is not possible, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or the York Region Public Health at 1-800-361-5653 for further assessment and guidance
- Once the person has left, clean and disinfect the space in which the person had been
  - Cleaning and disinfection guidance available at york.ca/covid19 under the Resources heading
- Maintain cleaning and disinfecting policies
- Facilities should follow their standard protocols for routine cleaning and disinfection, especially for high-touch surfaces such as door handles, hand rails, light switches, toilet handles, and faucet handles
- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19
- Water fountain mouthpieces should be regularly cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer’s recommendations