

COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

In-person gatherings for prayer and worship are permitted with certain conditions. All places of worship must adhere to public health advice, as outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Health’s [COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#). 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.

GATHERING LIMITS

All religious services, rites, ceremonies and related celebrations/events must comply with gathering restrictions, as outlined in the [Reopening Ontario Act – Stage 3 Orders](#).

These gathering limits are the maximum allowed if all staff and guests maintain 2-metres [physical distancing](#).

	Religious service, rite or ceremony	Staffed event or social gathering ^a at a licensed facility ^b	Private event or social gathering at a private home setting ^c
Indoor	30% capacity or less of any given room in the building	50 people or less	10 people or less
Outdoor	100 people or less <i>Note a religious service performed in a backyard (e.g., wedding) must adhere to the private event / social gathering limits</i>	100 people or less	25 people or less

^a Includes social activities before and/or after service, receptions with food after service etc., and may be planned or spontaneous

^b 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)

^c Includes unstaffed businesses or facilities (e.g. private residences, backyards, parks, and other recreation areas). See [COVID-19: Guidance for Public Gatherings](#) for more information

Note that you cannot combine events (e.g., an indoor plus an outdoor event; a religious ceremony plus an outdoor event; hire staff plus an indoor private event) to achieve permission for a larger gathering size.

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca



All places of worship **must** adhere to the following requirements:

- Indoor gatherings may host a maximum of 30% of the room capacity (or less)
- Outdoor gatherings may host a maximum of 100 people (or less)
- All guests must maintain a [physical distance](#) of 2-metres from anyone outside of their social / family circle and wear a mask:
 - Effective Friday, July 17, 2020, business owners and operators in York Region must have a policy in place to prohibit people from entering if they are not wearing a face mask or covering. Customers, employees and visitors who enter enclosed public spaces must wear a face mask or covering
- Limiting singing and loud speaking
- Avoiding 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
- Enhance cleaning and disinfecting frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition
- Manage the flow of guests to encourage one-way movement and physical distancing and limit crowding, particularly at entrances, exits, hallways and restrooms
- 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

- Consider alternative ways to involve individuals at greater risk from COVID-19, including online services
- Plan how to ensure physical distancing indoors by calculating 30% of the capacity of any available spaces (e.g., rooms). This is the maximum number of participants allowed.
- Remove seating, or if seating is fixed, mark it unavailable or rope it off to ensure a 2-metre distance between rows of seating. Plan the quantity of seating to allow for a 2-metre distance between individuals or household groups along each row. If the reduced seating capacity will be less than the expected attendance, consider re-arranging the schedule of services to provide more, but smaller, services
- Plan how to control movement into and out of your facility, and within the space to ensure a 2-metre distance. Separate entrances and exits may not be necessary as participants usually enter and exit within distinct time periods
- Discourage movement against the flow of people moving in the space. It may be necessary to mark off 2-metre distances outside and/or in a vestibule if it is anticipated that lines will form. Consider having someone control leaving the space by seating row
- Consider developing a system to RSVP attendance to specific services or events. This may also allow online screening of attendees at the same time
- Ensure all water systems (drinking fountains) are safe to use after the prolonged facility shutdown to minimize risk of diseases associated with water. If drinking fountains are available, ensure they are used safely and cleaned and disinfected daily. Discontinue use of holy water stoup
- Develop a schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfecting, especially in areas where guests may wash themselves in preparation for ritual

PREVENT COVID-19 OUTBREAKS

- Ensure you have a way to contact attendees in the event that someone has attended your place of worship while contagious
 - Options include keeping a record of online RSVPs, having someone observe and record names, having members sign in through a safe method (do not provide a pen that can be passed between people), or providing a list of members upon request

- Public Health will use this list to notify attendees and staff in the event a positive COVID-19 case attended a religious service and there is a risk of transmission to others
- Encourage anyone with [symptoms of COVID-19](#) to stay home except to seek assessment and testing at [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#)
- Public health will advise of any additional cleaning and disinfecting measures needed to reduce the risk of spread in the setting
- At entrances and room doorways (as applicable), ensure that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available with at least 60% alcohol. All individuals should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving

ESTABLISH POLICIES FOR HEALTH SCREENING

Staff and volunteers must report illness immediately to their manager, and stay home if they are sick. Staff and volunteers must be [screened](#) each time before starting their duties. Persons who become ill while in the service must go home right away and [self-isolate](#). They can call their health care provider or seek assessment and testing at a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#).

TRAINING

Staff and volunteers should use a mask/face covering at all times while providing services. Instruct staff and volunteers on proper hand hygiene techniques and respiratory etiquette; when to use masks, [proper use of masks](#), and how to clean or discard single use masks appropriately.

PRINT AND POST SIGNS

- [COVID-19 health assessment](#) sign should be posted at all entrances
- Anyone with [COVID-19 symptoms](#), or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 is not permitted to enter
- [Handwashing](#) and [prevent the spread](#) signs should be posted in high visibility areas
- Post signage promoting [physical distancing](#), [passive screening](#), [mandatory mask](#) and any policies that may impact attendees

Add similar information to the organization's website. Encourage attendees to use this [self-assessment tool](#) before every visit to the place of worship and/or set up a screening station away from the entrance to avoid crowding.

DURING SERVICES

- Remind everyone not to attend the service in person if they are experiencing [symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- Modify the activities before and during the service to ensure a 2-metre distance between leaders, staff, volunteers and attendees at all times
- Children should remain with their parents. Any childcare and/or children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the Ministry of Health's [COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#)
- Activities that increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission should be adapted or discontinued
- Respiratory droplets and aerosols generated during singing, loud speech or use of wind instruments may travel further than 2 metres., consider:
 - Using a microphone to prevent loud speech
 - Discouraging congregational singing and chanting.

- Discouraging choir or group singing. If more than one person is singing, limit the number of people to the fewest singers possible
- Placing anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments 2 metres apart from anyone else and separated by an impermeable barrier (e.g., plexiglass). If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be separated from any other person (outside of the same household or social circle) to the greatest extent possible (but at least 2 metres)
- With instrumental music (e.g. piano, organ, but not wind instruments), if more than one instrument is being played, ensure physical distancing, unless players are from the same household/social circle
- Attendees must wear [non-medical mask/face coverings](#) while at indoor services. Post [signage](#) indicating masks are required. Cloth masks can be made with household items such as a t-shirt bedsheet, or a bandana may be used. Physical distancing is still required even when using a mask
- Avoid any physical contact. Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave (e.g., during exchange of the Peace)
- Allow for adequate cleaning and disinfecting of prayer and high traffic areas between services
- Avoid use of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize 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 service, or use projection or audio-visual systems. Do not share microphones
- Rituals involving close physical contact (e.g., baptism, circumcision) or shared items (e.g., receptacles, washing facilities) are strongly discouraged at this time. If they must be performed, considerations need to be made to provide them safely such as use of appropriate personal protective equipment
 - Discontinuing communion is strongly recommended at this time. Discontinue use of holy water rites
- Do not pass offering plates. Consider a designed area to offer donations or use of online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines
- Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with hand sanitizer stations (greater than 60% alcohol concentration). Avoid access to hand sanitizer by young children without supervision
- Encourage good respiratory etiquette. Cover mouth and nose with elbow when coughing or sneezing or use a tissue then discard tissue in waste bin. Wash or sanitize hands after
- Remind members of your place of worship that social gatherings to celebrate events around services or ceremonies should be kept to small numbers (10 people maximum indoors, 25 people maximum outdoors) or rescheduled

ENHANCED CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- 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](#)
- Educate staff on 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) twice a day or more, and when visibly dirty
- Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towel. Antibacterial soap is not required to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning

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

- Only members of the same household can be in one vehicle
- Discourage people from leaving their vehicles during the service, except to use the washroom
- Vehicles must be parked 2-metres 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

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 york.ca/covid19 or call York Region Public Health at 1-800-361-5653. Also see [A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3](#).

Last update: September 30, 2020

Adapted with permission from Toronto Public Health