

## Guidelines for Faith-Based Gatherings in Places of Worship

The below in-person service guidelines apply to both indoor and outdoor faith-based gatherings, except where more specific provincial guidance exists, such as the guidelines for outdoor drive-in events which is available at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/resources/index.html>.

Places of worship should follow gathering size limitations, and be aware that public health orders around gathering size are subject to change. Preference is given to holding gatherings outdoors, where possible, to further minimize the risk (weather permitting).

Multiple services may be needed depending on the size of the congregation. It is important to note that faith-based gatherings in places of worship have demonstrated to be a higher risk setting as shown by the number of outbreaks reported earlier in the pandemic from these types of gatherings. Congregants should focus on adhering to public health guidance on physical distancing, hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette to lower the risk of COVID-19.

The following guidelines should be followed by all individuals who attend places of worship.

### Protecting Congregants and Members of the Public

- Congregants, staff, and volunteers are reminded to stay home if they are feeling unwell, even if their symptoms are mild (visit [www.manitoba.ca/covid19/about/index.html](http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/about/index.html) for a list of symptoms).
- All congregants, staff, and volunteers should screen themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 or exposures prior to entering the facility. Post signage available at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/resources/index.html> to aid congregants in screening themselves for symptoms and exposures.
- Where possible, congregants should register for attendance at in-person services to ensure occupancy limits are followed. This also allows the facility to maintain lists of all congregants for at least 21 days to ensure appropriate public health follow-up can take place if a congregant is exposed to COVID-19 during the service.
- Designate health and safety representatives to develop processes and ensure congregants are following COVID-19 guidance recommendations.
- Maintain a single point of entry to the building and ensure physical distancing is maintained. Consideration must be given to how people enter/exit seating areas. Line-ups and areas where people congregate (e.g., foyer, washrooms) should be monitored to ensure congregants maintain a physical distance of two metres/six feet. Floor markers may be installed to help congregants with maintaining separation and signs should be posted to remind congregants to maintain their

distance from people outside of their household. Establish different points of entry and exit from high-traffic areas, where feasible to do so.

- Seating arrangements should allow for a two metre/six foot separation on all sides between congregants from different households. When standing, a two metre/six foot separation is still required for non-household members.
- Discourage in-person attendance for people at higher risk of experiencing severe illness. Those at higher risk, including people 60 years of age and older and individuals living with a chronic health condition or weakened immune system, are more likely to develop more serious illness. Virtual options should continue to be available for those who cannot, or choose not, to attend in-person.
- Consider creative options to in-person attendance such as “drive-in” outdoor events where congregants stay in their vehicles for the duration of the service. Outdoor drive-in events should follow applicable guidelines.
- Encourage congregants to visit their place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services (e.g., confession).
- If the service is indoors, minimize the time that individuals are together. There is currently no evidence on a specific amount of time that is safe. If possible, increase ventilation by opening windows.

## **Guidance on Higher-Risk Activities**

- Faith-based activities, rituals and practices should be reviewed to determine if they increase the risk of spreading COVID-19, with a focus on those that increase the risk of COVID-19 through contact (touching surfaces) or droplet transmission (sneezing, coughing, singing). Consider discontinuing or altering practices or activities that increase risk.
- Congregants are advised to physically distance themselves from members outside of their household, except for brief necessary exchanges. Traditional greetings such as handshakes should be avoided. Ushers and greeters must maintain a physical (social) distance and avoid physical contact with congregants. Monitor young children to ensure they maintain a two metre/ six foot distance from other children and congregants.
  - Ceremonial traditions that involve close contact, including handling of the Torah scroll or baptisms, should be altered to maintain a two metre/ six foot separation.
  - Consider alternative methods to the traditional passing of the peace with a handshake, such as a nod of the head, bow or other appropriate gesture that maintains a two metre/six foot separation.
- Passing objects between congregants, such as offering baskets/donation collection plates, is not advised. Rather, consider providing online offering/giving options, placing a stationary basket at the front of the facility or offering other alternatives to offering baskets/donation collection plates.
- Instructional settings for children (e.g., Sunday school) should follow the applicable guidelines for day camps at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/index.html>. Small group, instructional settings for adults (e.g., bible study) must follow social distancing and gathering size requirements, bearing in mind that there is currently no evidence on a specific amount of time that is safe. Therefore, if possible, minimize the time spent together in-person and increase ventilation by opening windows or meeting outside.

- Singing and playing woodwind or brass instruments are high-risk activities because the virus can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets. Choirs are not recommended at this time; refer to the applicable guidelines for music (vocalists and instrumentalists at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/index.html>). In addition:
  - Discourage congregational singing and chanting. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music.
  - Consider a soloist or other lower risk instrumentalist, such as a pianist.
  - Consider using pre-prepared audio or video recordings rather than live vocalists or instrumentalists.
- Provision of food and beverages (e.g. communion) before, during or after faith-based activities or events is strongly discouraged because of the increased risk of the inherent close contact involved with offering and accepting the food/drink. Consider alternatives to traditional methods that maintain physical distancing and follow good hand hygiene, such as:
  - Placing pre-packaged food/drink in individual portions at a designated place in the facility for congregants to pick-up, eliminating the need for physical contact between designated serving individuals and congregants.
  - Eliminating the practice of congregants sharing drink containers or utensils (e.g., spoon, plates, chalice, etc.).
- Group meals continue to be discouraged. Other social gatherings that occur outside of in-person services should follow all guidelines related to social distancing, group size, cleaning/disinfecting, food/drink and other applicable guidelines.
- Avoid offering shared receptacles for liquid (e.g. holy water fonts).

## Cleaning and Disinfection

- Ensure hand hygiene stations are available at entry and throughout the facility.
- All common-touch surfaces must be frequently cleaned/disinfected with Health Canada approved disinfectants that kill viruses, at minimum twice daily. Washrooms must have frequent cleaning/disinfection, and must be cleaned/disinfected after each congregational service. Developing and posting a cleaning/disinfection schedule will assist facilities in ensuring commonly touched surfaces and washrooms are adequately cleaned/disinfected.
- Shared equipment and objects (e.g., microphones, speakers, ceremonial objects, books, hymns, prayer mats) should be cleaned/disinfected after each use. Consider pre-recording readings and single use paper bulletins or project materials to alleviate the need for people to share a microphone or hymnals.
  - If shared equipment cannot be cleaned/disinfected between congregants, then it should be removed and not used, i.e. song books, pens/pencils.
  - If it is required for religious/spiritual reasons, touching of ceremonial objects (e.g., statues, religious symbols, rings) may occur if individuals perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object, and the objects are cleaned before and after use.
  - Prayer mats, prayer beads, Qur'ans and other holy books and items should not be shared. They can be temporarily stowed away safely.
- If washing facilities are required, they should include hand hygiene products (soap, water paper towels).