



August 5, 2020

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship:

[Ontario has announced](#) that effective Friday, June 12, 2020, places of worship are permitted to open with physical distancing in place and attendance limited to no more than 30 percent of the building’s regular capacity. Faith community leaders should carefully consider how and when to re-open places of worship. Places of worship should ensure that any re-opening plan is consistent with [Ontario requirements](#), guidance and protocols, and any requirements identified by Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the city of Ottawa. This includes reviewing and implementing measures from OPH’s [Businesses and Workplaces – COVID-19 Information](#) and the City of Ottawa’s [Business Reopening Toolkit](#).

In addition, all places of worship should follow the specific public health guidance below and review their programming and worship services to keep everyone, especially the most vulnerable, as safe as possible. **OPH’s guidance is subject to change as new information is received.**

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| <p>Screening and attendance log</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All individuals, including children, must be screened upon arrival or prior to their entry to place of worship each time they attend services. Entry should be denied to any individual who: a) has any of the symptoms of COVID-19; b) has come in close contact with a person who has COVID-19 or another person with symptoms of COVID-19 during the past 14 days; or c) has travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days. • Staff and volunteers must be screened daily before starting their duties. • Screening for attendees, staff and volunteers can be done using Ontario’s self-assessment tool or Ottawa Public Health screening tool. If the screening tool recommends the person be tested for COVID-19 (i.e. they have symptoms), they must not attend in-person services and or events. • Consider developing a system to RSVP attendance to specific services or events. This may also allow online screening of attendees at the same time. • Post signage on the entry door and throughout the place of worship to prompt anyone to self-identify if they feel unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, or been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. • Consider posting OPH’s posters relevant to health and safety best practices: Stop Before Entering – Self-screening Poster; Practice Physical Distancing; Steps to Prevent the Spread of Germs; Safely Putting on and Taking off Masks, Mask Required; Mandatory Mask Infographic. • Keep an attendance log for In-Person Worship Services or Gatherings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Places of Worship must ensure that everyone who attends worship or gatherings must register or pre-register by providing names (at least one person per group, if applicable), contact information (such as phone number and/or email), and when possible, where the attendants will be seated, and before participating in any services. |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For open spaces where there are no seats and people would pray standing or kneeling on the floor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household and consider visual markings using a numbering system (tape or sign) on the ground. ● Information gathered should be stored on-site and in a safe location. Places of worship will be responsible for the privacy and storing of the records. Records must only be disclosed to a medical officer of health or an inspector under the <i>Health Protection and Promotion Act</i> on request for a purpose specified in section 2 of that Act or as otherwise required by law. ● Information collected should be destroyed after 30 days from time of collection. |
| Mask Bylaw | <p>Ottawa City Council has made masks mandatory in indoor public spaces: Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law. According to the bylaw every person who enters or remains in an Enclosed Public Space shall wear a mask in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Operators of an enclosed public space must ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ anyone not wearing a mask is given a verbal reminder to do so ○ at every public entrance/exit there is signage that states all persons entering the premises must wear a mask under the city of Ottawa By-law 2020-186 ○ alcohol-based hand rub is available at all public entrances/exits. ● There are exemptions including (but not limited to): children under two years of age and individuals with medical conditions. ● “Enclosed Public Space” means indoor public spaces of businesses and organizations, accessed by the public. ● Under this Bylaw, ‘enclosed public spaces’ include but are not limited to: churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, or other places of worship. |
| Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As per the Provincial announcement, on-site attendance may not exceed 30 percent of the building capacity. Places of worship will need to evaluate their own spaces to ensure that the 30 percent occupancy maximum can still ensure the maintenance of physical distancing between households. Some spaces and/or their entries or exits may not permit 30 percent occupancy and a lower maximum may need to be selected. ● Operators who choose to open should consider that capacity restrictions on their own do not address many important factors that may contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Other factors include: entry and exit space and flow, the size and shape of the building where congregation is expected to occur, the layout of spaces where congregants will spend time, the activity occurring at each gathering, screening of participants, and cleaning procedures. ● Only allow one point of entry and a separate point of exit, especially if there will be overlap between people entering and exiting. However, for big buildings that may have a large number of attendees, the risk of crowding may need to be mitigated by exercising greater control of entrance and exit processes (e.g., dismiss one row at a time); and/or using more than one entrance and exit. If using more than one point of entry, facilities need to coordinate between doors to ensure no more than 30 |

percent occupancy is admitted into the building. The distancing of a least 2 metres must be maintained in all phases of approaching, entering, and being in the building.

- Weather permitting, prop entry and exit doors open to prevent patrons from touching handles/bars.
- Ventilate spaces by opening doors, windows etc.
- Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content must be available at facility entrance and exit and available in every room (as applicable).
- All visitors should be asked to clean their hands upon entry and exit.
- Mark seating to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household.
- Mark directional flow of people through buildings and areas to maintain distancing and to avoid movement against the flow of people.
- Block off (if appropriate) and have visual markings on the ground, where congregants, staff and volunteers may be sitting or standing.
- Manage access to washrooms in a way that promotes physical distancing and cleaning and disinfection. Ensure washrooms are well stocked with liquid soap and paper towels, and that warm running water is available. In washrooms with multiple sinks, consider blocking access to every second sink to ensure physical distancing.
- Discontinue use of any communal items (e.g., shared glasses, dishes, etc).
- Places of worship who offer free or rented spaces to other groups or businesses must ensure these groups or businesses also abide by this guidance and other Ontario requirements.
- Cleaning and disinfecting:
 - Clean and disinfect, at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of worshippers), whichever is higher, frequently touched surfaces. Surfaces most likely to become contaminated include, but are not limited to, doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons, water fountain/cooler knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, ceremonial objects, electronic devices, and tabletops. Refer to [PHO's Environmental Cleaning fact sheet](#):
 - Only use cleaning and disinfectant products that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN); it should be stated on product packaging. Low-level hospital grade disinfectants may be used; and
 - Checking expiry dates of cleaning and disinfectant products used and always following the manufacturer's instructions. Ensure that the product used are compatible with the item to be cleaned and disinfected.
 - Garbage bins should be lined with plastic bags;
 - Cleaning guidance can be found on OPH's website for [Environmental Cleaning Guidance](#).

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| <p>Protecting congregants, staff and volunteers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing of 2 metres must be maintained at all times, and in all directions, between people who are not from the same household. Individuals from the same household may be seated together and should remain in place once they are seated. Offer multiple services and opportunities to worship to reduce the attendance. If multiple services are held on a single day, the start and end times must allow those who attend one service to exit safely, avoiding contact with those arriving for the next service. Time is needed to clean and disinfect common surfaces between services. • Cohort individuals and families. For instance, when possible organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different individuals/families. • Consider alternative ways to involve individuals at greater risk from COVID-19, including online services. • Consider establishing caps on attendance (in addition to the Provincial limit of no more than 30 percent of building capacity) to ensure physical distancing is maintained. Identify a method to monitor and enforce attendance caps at each service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider establishing a system for congregants to RSVP to attend specific services or events to minimize overcrowding. • All staff and volunteers are required to wear a mask at all times while in the place of worship. • All attendees are required to wear a mask to reduce the risk of transmission. Attendees who cannot wear a mask should not attend; if they feel they must attend then a face shield must be worn and at least 2-metre distancing must be respected at all times. A face shield would not be considered an equal substitute for a face mask as it does not provide filtering capacity. Information on masks, including how to correctly use one, can be found on OPH's masks webpage. • Ensure hand hygiene and proper cough and sneeze etiquette while in the place of worship. Avoid touching face with unwashed hands. Post signage to reinforce this. • Children should remain with their parents. Separate children's activities should be suspended. • Staff and volunteers should be given information and training about appropriate physical distancing, processes, and hygiene practices. • To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee at the place of worship tests positive, places of worship should keep up to date contact information for individuals who attend their services. Places of worship should be prepared to contact attendees with further guidance from Ottawa Public health in event of an exposure to COVID-19. |
| <p>High risk population</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPH states that the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases progressively with age, particularly beyond 50 to 60 years. In addition to increasing age, people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions (cardiovascular, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung, chronic liver, cancer, immunocompromise) or severe obesity are at higher risk for severe illness. Every individual needs to take into account their personal risk factors when making decisions about going out. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith communities who have members who are older and/or have chronic medical conditions may wish to implement specific accommodations for these individuals. To support this, places of worship may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recommend vulnerable individuals take part in virtual or drive-in services; and ○ Offer a dedicated service for them |
| <p>Higher Risk Activities</p> | <p>Places of worship should review all activities, rituals, and practices that occur to determine if they increase the risk of spreading COVID-19 amongst congregants, staff and/or volunteers. Any activity or practice that increases the risk of COVID-19 through contact (e.g., touching surfaces or objects) or droplet transmission (e.g., sneezing, coughing, singing, shouting) should be discontinued or altered to prevent the risk. The following section provides guidance on some common higher risk activities that may occur in places of worship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social activities such as communal lunches or dinners that would occur during faith-based activities are not permitted at this time. • Singing & Playing of Brass and Wind Instruments:* <p>Although permitted in Stage 3, singing in a choir and playing brass and wind instruments are higher risk activities for COVID-19 transmission. If singing or playing brass and wind instruments are going to take place, OPH recommends the following precautions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There must be Plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier between performers and the audience/congregation. ○ Performers should be spaced a minimum of 2 metres apart, but ideally more, and face away from each other if possible. ○ Performers should be separated from each other by Plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier unless the singers are within the same exclusive social circle. ○ Microphones and amplification should be used if possible rather than projecting the voice. ○ The number of singers should be limited to further decrease the risk. <p>*This is guidance is based on the information we have available at the moment, but it is subject to change. We are currently awaiting Stage 3 updates to the provincial Religious Services, Rites and Ceremonies document which may provide further guidance on singing in places of worship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal Interactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shaking hands, hugging, touching or passing items must not occur, except between members of the same household. Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave. ○ Religious rituals that involve physical contact between individuals, such as anointing with oils increase the likelihood of disease transmission and should be delayed, performed in an alternate fashion that minimizes physical contact, or if must be performed, consideration to provide them as safely as possible such as use of appropriate protective equipment. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food and beverage service must be suspended at this time. ● Weddings and Funerals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For a wedding, funeral or other ceremony occurring indoors in a place of worship, the maximum number of participants for that ceremony is 30% of the capacity of the building. However, the above requirements still apply, including suspending social gatherings before or after the service, and not providing food services. ○ Weddings and funerals in an outdoor setting are allowed up to 100 people, while maintaining social distancing rules. ○ Receptions are limited to a maximum of 50 persons. ● Shared Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not hand out or share items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected before and after each use (e.g., books, hymns, prayer mats, head coverings, programs). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider using projection or audio-visual systems to share information. ○ Microphones should be set up once and then not touched by individual users, as these devices are difficult to clean and disinfect. ○ Do not offer shared receptacles for liquid. ○ If it is required for religious or spiritual reasons, touching of ceremonial objects may occur if hand hygiene is performed before and after touching the object. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individuals must not kiss, embrace or press their faces on any shared ceremonial object. ○ Do not pass donation collection plates or containers between congregants. Alternatives include: online offerings/donations; and a designated area to place offerings/donations. Touching of offerings/donations collected from patrons should be minimized for a period of three days. ● Children’s Programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission including regular childcare and children’s programming (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/child-care-re-opening-operational-guidance.pdf) ○ Screen children and log attendance daily. ○ Clean frequently and regularly the space, toys and equipment. |
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This guidance has been adapted from [The Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#); [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services’ Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19](#); Alberta’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship](#); Saskatchewan’s [Places of Worship Guidelines](#), and Toronto Public Health’s [COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship](#).

This guidance is subject to change as new information is received. Plan to regularly check for new guidance as part of *your* COVID-19 re-opening plan. It is important to recognize that the COVID-19 situation is evolving very quickly. Please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus for up to date information.