



October 15, 2020

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

PLEASE NOTE: Effective October 10, 2020 the Province of Ontario has placed further restrictions on social gatherings, events and other establishments.

- Outdoor gatherings are now restricted to a maximum of 25 people and indoor gatherings are now restricted to maximum of 10 people (where physical distancing can be maintained).
- Capacity limits also reduced to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors for tour guide services, real estate open houses, meeting and event spaces, in-person teaching and instruction where physical distancing can be maintained (with exemptions for schools, childcare centres, colleges, etc.).
- Indoor and outdoor events or gatherings cannot be merged together (ex. gathering of 35 people, with 25 people outdoors and 10 people indoors is not permissible).
- Indoor food and drink service in restaurants, bar and other food and drink establishments is now prohibited.
- The following indoor sites are now closed: gyms and fitness centres (i.e. exercise classes and weight and exercise rooms), casino's, indoor cinemas, performing arts centres and venues, spectator areas in racing venues, interactive exhibits in museums, galleries, zoos, mall food courts etc.
- Indoor fitness, exercise or dance classes cannot be provided.
- The total number of members of the public permitted to be in a class, organized program or organized activity at any facility (including arenas and multi-purpose facilities) cannot exceed 10 people and each class, organized program or organized activity must take place in a separate room.
- Personal care services, where face coverings must be removed (like makeup application, beard trimming), are now prohibited.
- Team sports now limited to training sessions only (no games or scrimmages) and no spectators are permitted.

[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.

All religious services, rites, and ceremonies must adhere to the appropriate emergency orders under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, particularly [Stage3: O. Reg 364/20](#).

On August 21, 2020 the Ontario Ministry of Health updated the Guidance for Places of Worship with several activities which may be suspended or adapted with mitigation measures. These include singing and playing of brass and wind instruments, hosting of social gatherings before and after in-person services, and the sharing of objects or materials. Further information on these activities, including the required mitigation measures, have been included in this updated OPH guidance document.

OPH’s guidance is subject to change as new information is received.

<p>Screening</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 OPH’s Screening Tool for Workplaces/Post-Secondary Institutions. 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 other visible locations 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.
<p>Masks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective October 3, 2020, the Province updated the Ontario Regulation 364/20 that mandates the use of masks in all public indoor settings across Ontario which includes workplaces. • Building on the current Ottawa Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law, which requires masks to be worn in all publicly-accessed indoor spaces, the new provincial measures now extends this requirement to all indoor areas including those not accessible to the public, where a two-meter distance from others cannot be maintained at all times. • According to the regulation 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. • 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 sanitizer with greater than 60% alcohol is available at all public entrances/exits. All individuals should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving. ● There are exemptions including (but not limited to) children under two years of age and individuals with medical conditions. ● It is also strongly recommended that all individuals wear a mask in outdoor spaces where physical distancing may be a challenge or not possible.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As of October 3, 2020, enhanced public health measures for Ottawa include restrictions for gathering limits. ● Outdoor gatherings are now restricted to a maximum of 25 people (previous limit of 100), and indoor gatherings are now restricted to maximum of 10 people (previous limit of 50). ● Indoor and outdoor events or gatherings cannot be merged together (ex. gathering of 35 people, with 25 people outdoors and 10 people indoors is not permissible). ● The new limits, do not apply to events or gatherings held in staffed businesses and facilities such as restaurants, cinemas, banquet halls, gyms and places of worship ● For places of worship, 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 or small consistent social groups. 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, hallway, 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, including hallways. ● Weather permitting, prop entry and exit doors open to prevent patrons from touching handles/bars. ● Ventilate spaces by opening doors, windows etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 or small consistent social group. • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service (e.g., distinct groups of worshippers), whichever is more frequent. 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 Public Health Ontario’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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check expiry dates of cleaning and disinfectant products used and always follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Ensure that the products 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.
<p>Protecting congregants, staff and volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Physical distancing</u> of 2 metres must be maintained at all times, and in all directions, between people who are not from the same household or small consistent social group. Individuals from the same household or small consistent group 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider cohorting 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 in visible locations to reinforce this. • Children should remain with their parents. Separate children's activities should be adapted or suspended. • Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the Ministry of Health's COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps. • 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 or enter the facility, including names, contact information (phone number), times and dates. Places of worship should be prepared to contact attendees with further guidance from Ottawa Public health in event of an exposure to COVID-19.
High risk population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ottawa Public Health 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.

	<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 protect these persons, 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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social activities that would occur during faith-based activities such as communal lunches or dinners with food and beverage service are considered social gatherings and must be adapted or suspended at this time. ○ If held, these activities are subject to public gathering limits, and physical distancing is required. ○ Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites and ceremonies. • Singing & Playing of Brass and Wind Instruments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singing or wind or brass instrumental music. ○ Group singing is strongly discouraged. However, if more than one person is singing, limit the number of people singing to the fewest possible. ○ Anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be 2 metres from anyone else and separated by an impermeable barrier. If an impermeable barrier is not used, anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be separated from any other person, including other performers, who are outside of the same household or social circle, to the greatest extent possible (but at least 2 metres). ○ 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Microphones and amplification should be used if possible, rather than projecting the voice. ● 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 or small consistent social group. 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. ● Food: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food and beverage service is considered a social gathering, and must be adapted or suspended at this time. ○ If held, food and beverage service are subject to public gathering limits, and physical distancing is required. ○ Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites and ceremonies. ● 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. ○ Social gatherings before or after the service, including those where food and drink are shared, are subject to gathering limits, and physical distancing is required. Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites and ceremonies ● Private Outdoor gatherings are now restricted to a maximum of 25 people (previous limit of 100), and private indoor gatherings are now restricted to maximum of 10 people (previous limit of 50). ● Indoor and outdoor events or gatherings cannot be merged together (ex. gathering of 35 people, with 25 people outdoors and 10 people indoors is not permissible). ● The new limits, do not apply to events or gatherings held in staffed businesses and facilities such as restaurants, cinemas, banquet halls, gyms and places of worship ● The total number of members of the public permitted to be in all of the rentable meeting or event space in the business or place at any one time is limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least two meters from every other person in the business or place, and in any event is not permitted to exceed 50 persons for an indoor meeting or event or 100 persons for an outdoor meeting or event.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is strongly recommended that all individuals wear a mask in outdoor spaces where physical distancing may be a challenge or not possible. ● Shared Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing or distributing materials or objects is considered to be an activity that increase the risk of disease transmission. This may include but is not limited to; books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water, etc... ○ It is recommended to adapt or suspend such activities. ○ If any materials or objects are shared or distributed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that hand hygiene is performed prior to distribution or sharing. ● Consider leaving objects or materials to be distributed on a table for individuals to pick up and/or limit the number of individuals who have contact with materials or objects. ● Ensure any materials or objects that are returned or accessed within the setting are disinfected or not re-used immediately. ● If it is required for religious or spiritual reasons, touching of ceremonial objects may occur if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● hand hygiene is performed before and after touching the object. ● individuals must not kiss, embrace or press their faces on any shared ceremonial object ● 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). ● 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. 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"> ● Adapt or suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission including regular childcare and children's programming. ● Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the Ministry of Health's COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps.
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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 Guidance for Places of Worship](#), [Saskatchewan's Guidelines for Places of Worship](#), and [Toronto Public Health's 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](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/coronavirus) for up to date information.