



December 18, 2020

COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship

Places of Worship are responsible for complying with the provisions set out in the applicable Regulation(s) under the Provincial [Reopening Ontario Act](#). As well, the Province has released the [COVID-19 Response Framework: Keeping Ontario Safe and Open](#) that has five levels of public health measures: **Prevent (green)**, **Protect (yellow)**, **Restrict (orange)**, **Control (red)** and Lockdown. This guidance document describes the Provincial requirements that all religious services, rites, ceremonies and related celebrations must comply with, as well as local recommendations to reduce the risks of transmission in the City of Ottawa.

It is important to recognize that the COVID-19 situation is evolving very quickly. As such, **OPH's guidance is subject to change as new information is received**. Please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus for up-to-date information, including the current status of enhanced measures in Ottawa.

Places of worship, faith leaders and attendees all have a responsibility to assess the risks associated with in-person services, and to develop plans to mitigate these risks. These include implementing and adhering to measures to reduce the risk of infection among all those who participate in activities, including facility staff, faith leaders, volunteers and attendees.

Attendees are also responsible for assessing risks to themselves, their family and those associated with their participation. They are also responsible for following the measures put in place by a Place of Worship to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, as well as adhering to the details of the setting's safety plan. **OPH continues to recommend that Places of Worship consider alternatives to in-person services (e.g. virtual services or drive-in options), where possible, to reduce the risks of transmission.**

Table 1 below provides general requirements, as well as occupancy limits in each of the Province's five levels of public health measures, for weddings, funerals or a religious services, rites or ceremonies according to the Provincial framework (and as per the relevant regulations under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#)).

Please note:

- Occupancy limits are maximums, and are permitted provided organizer can ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between households (including essential supports)
- Indoor events or gatherings cannot be combined with outdoor events or gatherings so as to increase the applicable limit on the number of people at the event or gathering

Table 1: Public Health Measures for Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies at Places of Worship

| | Prevent (Standard Measures) | Protect (Strengthened Measures) | Restrict (Intermediate Measures) | Control (Stringent Measures) | Lockdown (Maximum Measures) |
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| Applicable Regulation | O. Reg. 364/20 | | | O. Reg. 263/20 | O. Reg. 82/20 |
| Requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workplace screening Face coverings, with limited exemptions Physical distancing must be maintained Personal protective equipment that provides protection of the eyes, nose, and mouth, is required if a worker is required to come within 2 metres (6 feet) of another person who is not wearing a face covering and not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier. Ensure that equipment, washrooms, locker rooms, change rooms, showers that are accessible to the public are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition. Non-essential travel from areas of high transmission to areas of low transmission should be avoided | | | Requirements from previous level apply, as well as widescale measures and restrictions, including closures, to halt or interrupt transmission (modified Stage 1 or pre-Stage 1). | |
| Indoor occupancy limits for religious services, rites or ceremonies if held in a building or structure other than a private dwelling | The number of persons occupying any room in the building or structure while attending the gathering must not exceed 30% of the capacity of the particular room. | | | 10 people Virtual and drive-in wedding services, funeral services and religious services, rites or ceremonies encouraged. | |
| Outdoor occupancy limits for religious services, rites or ceremonies | 100 people | | | | |
| Indoor limits for social gatherings (e.g. receptions, rentals) held at Places of Worship | 50 people | | | 5 people | Not permitted |
| Outdoor limits for social gatherings (e.g. receptions, rentals) held at Places of Worship | 100 people | | | 25 people | 10 people |
| Indoor limits for social gatherings associated with a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony held at residential buildings | 10 people | | | 5 people | Not permitted |
| Outdoor limits for social gatherings associated with a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony held at residential buildings | 25 people | | | 25 people | 10 people |

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| <p>Gathering in motor vehicles for religious service, rite or ceremony (aka “drive-in”)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each person attending the gathering, other than the persons conducting the service, rite or ceremony, must remain within a motor vehicle that is designed to be closed to the elements, except, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ where necessary to use a washroom, or ○ as may otherwise be necessary for the purposes of health and safety. • The driver of a motor vehicle must ensure that it is positioned at least two metres away from other motor vehicles. • A person who ordinarily uses a non-motorized vehicle because of their religious belief and who attends the gathering must remain within their non-motorized vehicle except where necessary to use a washroom or as may otherwise be required for health and safety |
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The following sections provide detailed operational guidance with respect to Places of Worship in Ottawa. Please note that religious ceremonies, rites and/or ceremonies must also comply with the requirements set out by the Provincial [Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#).

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| <p>Screening</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All individuals, including children, must be screened upon arrival or prior to their entry to a Place of Worship each time they attend services. Entry should be denied to any individual who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) has any of the symptoms of COVID-19 b) has come in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 or a person with symptoms consistent with 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 indicates that someone should not attend in-person services and/or recommends the person be tested for COVID-19 (i.e., they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19), they must follow all instructions • Consider developing a system to RSVP attendance to specific services or events. This may also allow online screening of attendees at the same time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 attendance log 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. • 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 somebody who is confirmed to have tested positive for COVID-19. |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 and hand hygiene. |
| <p>Masks</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per the applicable Provincial regulations, masks or face coverings are required in all public indoor settings across Ontario, as well as all indoor areas <u>including those not accessible to the public</u> where physical distancing of at least 2-meters (6 feet) cannot be maintained. This includes Places of Worship. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These Provincial requirements complement the Ottawa Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law, which requires masks to be worn in all publicly accessed indoor spaces According to the regulation, every person who enters or remains in an enclosed public space shall wear a well-fitting mask in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin. Look for 3-layered masks (2 layers of tightly woven cloth inside and outside, and a filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene fabric in between) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-fitting 2-layer cloth masks made of tightly woven materials may still be used, since they work almost as well, especially to block your own respiratory droplets from others. As you replace or add to your cloth masks, choose 3-layered masks. 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, as per 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 the premises. 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 become a challenge or not possible. <p>For more information about masks, please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/masks</p> |
| <p>Requirements for Employers</p> | <p>If two (2) or more people test positive for COVID-19 (e.g. two or more cases) are identified in connection with your workplace premise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately notify Ottawa Public Health at 613-580-2424 ext. 26325 if there are two or more people that test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day interval in connection with your workplace premises. Provide contact information for a designated contact person at the workplace premise and ensure that person is readily available to communicate with Ottawa Public Health and implement any |

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| | <p>additional measures immediately as required by Ottawa Public Health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Ensure that accurate and updated contact information for all workers (and clients if prescribed in O. Reg. 364/20) is available to be produced to Ottawa Public Health within 24 hours of request from Ottawa Public Health in support of case management and contact tracing requirements for COVID-19. d. Notify the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development and/or other relevant government authorities. Further information about employer’s responsibilities with respect to COVID-19 at: https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-coronavirus-and-workplace-health-and-safety. e. Cooperate with infection prevention and control personnel from Ottawa Public Health including allowing entry into the workplace premise for inspection, to support enhanced infection prevention and control measures and recommendations. <p>In order to encourage honest and forthright reporting of COVID-19 symptoms and/or contact amongst employees, ensure that all employees are aware of any benefits and/or pay to which they may be entitled in the event that they must isolate due to having symptoms of COVID-19, being tested for COVID-19, or being a close contact of someone infected with COVID-19. To assist employers OPH has created a resource for employers that describes different benefits here: www.OttawaPublicHealth.ca/WorkplaceCOVID19</p> |
| <p>Facilities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For places of worship in the Prevent (green), Protect (yellow), Restrict (orange), or Control (red) level of public health measures, indoor, on-site attendance may not exceed a maximum of 30 percent of the building capacity. • Places of worship must evaluate their own spaces to ensure that the 30 percent occupancy maximum can still ensure the maintenance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) of physical distancing between households plus essential supports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some spaces and/or their entries or exits may not permit 30 percent occupancy and a lower maximum may be needed. • Operators who choose to have in-person services 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, exit space and flow; the size and shape of the building where congregation is expected to occur; the layout of spaces where attendees 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. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 (6 feet) 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. ● Weather permitting, 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). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All visitors should be asked to clean their hands upon entry and exit. ● Mark seating to ensure at least 2 metres (6 feet) of physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household (including essential supports). ● 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 attendees, 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. |
| <p>Cleaning and disinfecting</p> | <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. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Physical distancing</u> of at least 2 metres (6 feet) must be maintained at all times, and in all directions, between people who are not from the same |

Protecting attendees, staff and volunteers

household or identified as an essential supports (up to two people). Individuals from the same household (including essential support) 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 also needed to clean and disinfect common surfaces between services.
- 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 at least 2 metres (6 feet) of physical distancing is maintained. Identify a method to monitor and enforce attendance caps at each service.
 - Consider establishing a system for attendees 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. Exceptions to mandatory face coverings are permitted in accordance with provincial regulations and the City of Ottawa Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law. Attendees who cannot wear a mask should preferentially choose online options to worship; if they feel they must attend then a face shield must be worn and at least 2 metres (6 feet) physical 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](#).
- All individuals should assess their own level of risk, and the health of every person in their household, when deciding to attend in-person services. If anyone in one's household is at higher risk from COVID-19, everyone should choose lower risk activities to keep them safe
- 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/guardians. Separate children's activities should be adapted or suspended.
- Child care and/or children's programming should operate in a manner consistent with the [Ministry of Health's COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#), or the Ministry of Education's [Child Care](#), [EarlyON Reopening](#), or [Before/After School Program](#) guidance.
 - For more information, please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/childcareCOVID19

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and volunteers should be given information and training about appropriate physical distancing, masks, 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 attendance log 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. |
| <p>High risk population</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases progressively with age. In addition to increasing age, people who have serious underlying medical conditions (such as: cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, chronic liver disease, cancer, are immunocompromised) or severe obesity are at higher risk for severe illness for COVID-19. Every individual needs to consider their personal risk factors when making decisions about attending in-person services. • 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(s) for them. <p>For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Older Adult web page, as well as OPH’s Older Adults and COVID 19 web page</p> |
| <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 transmitting COVID-19 amongst attendees, staff, and/or volunteers. Any activity or practice that increases the risk of COVID-19 through contact (e.g., touching surfaces or objects such as in communion) 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> <p>Social Events:</p> <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 the current public gathering limits, and at least 2 metres (6 feet) of physical distancing is required. • Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites, and ceremonies. Please refer to Table 1 above for more information <p>Singing & Playing of Brass and Wind Instruments:</p> |

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:

- 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 at least 2 metres (6 feet) 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 essential supports, to the greatest extent possible (but at least 2 metres/6 feet).
- Performers should be spaced a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) 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 household or essential supports.
- Microphones and amplification should be used if possible, rather than projecting the voice.
 - Microphones should be sanitized between users

Interpersonal Interactions:

- Shaking hands, hugging, touching or passing items must not occur, except between members of the same household or essential supports. 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:

- Food and beverage service are 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 as per the Regulations and Provincial Framework, with physical distancing required.
- Public gathering limits are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites and ceremonies.
- Rituals that include food (e.g. communion) are strongly discouraged at this time, and should be substituted where possible
 - Ensure that no food is shared, and pre-portion if needed
 - Do not drink from the same chalice as someone else

Weddings and Funerals:

- For a wedding, funeral or other ceremony occurring indoors in a place of worship in the **Prevent (green)**, **Protect (yellow)**, **Restrict (orange)**, or **Control (red)** level of public health measures, the maximum number of participants for that ceremony is 30% of the capacity of a particular room.
- 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.

Shared Items:

- 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:
- 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:
 - 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 attendees. 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:

- Adapt or suspend activities that increase the risk of disease transmission including regular childcare and children's programming.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any childcare and children’s programming should operate in a manner consistent with the Ministry of Health’s COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps, as well as the Ministry of Education’s guidance for Child Care, EarlyON, and/or Before/After School Programs. |
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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 plan. This guidance, along with the [COVID-19 Places of Worship Attendance Log](#), is available on [OPH’s COVID-19 Business and Workplaces](#) web page.