

COVID-19 Guidance for Faith Based Gatherings

September 23, 2020

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.

This document provides additional guidance for faith-based gatherings. This guidance must be used in conjunction with the [COVID-19 Prevention Guide for event organizers, theatres and performance venues](#), [COVID-19 Guidance for Musicians \(Vocalists and Instrumentalists\)](#) and all individuals must adhere to the public health measures outlined in the *Health Protection Act* [Order](#).

The most effective measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 includes separating people by maintaining physical distance (2 metres/6 feet) or the use of physical barriers where physical distance is difficult to maintain. Using a layered approach with multiple measures including environmental cleaning, the use of non-medical masks, conducting frequent hand hygiene and maintaining respiratory etiquette decreases the number of interactions and increases the safety of interactions that occur.

- Consider alternate options for an in-person gathering such as a virtual, outdoor or drive-in event.
- Individuals should not attend faith-based gatherings while ill, even if symptoms are mild. Visit the [811 website](#) for an up to date list of signs/symptoms.
- Maintain physical distancing between all individuals including congregants, ushers, greeters, officiant, etc. [people from the same household or pre-determined close social group do not have to keep physical distance].
- Adjust seating arrangements to allow physical distancing.
- Non-medical masks must be worn in all public indoor spaces
- Discourage in-person attendance for people at higher risk of experiencing severe illness (age; underlying health conditions).
- Traditional greetings such as handshakes and hugs should be avoided.
- Ceremonial traditions that involve sharing of items or close contact should be altered to maintain a 2 metre/6 foot separation. Avoid passing objects (e.g. offering baskets, collection plates, pipes, talking sticks, etc.); use alternative methods such as on-line collection, collection boxes, "self-serve" communion.
- Instructional settings for children (e.g. Sunday school) should follow the applicable guidelines for day camps at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Return-to-Day-Camp-Guidelines.pdf>

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- Small group, instructional settings for adults (e.g., bible study) must follow social distancing and gathering size requirements.
- Singing and playing wind or brass instruments are higher risk activities because the virus can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets. Choirs are not recommended at this time; refer to the [COVID-19 Guidance for Musicians \(Vocalists and Instrumentalists\)](#).
 - Discourage congregational singing and chanting. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music
 - Consider using pre-prepared audio or video recordings rather than live vocalists or instrumentalists.
 - For Ceremonies where drumming and chanting are core parts of the event, drummers should use their own drums and drumsticks, maintain physical distancing of 2 metres/6 feet, consider facing the same direction. Avoid sharing big drums, consider the use of hand drums.
- Providing food and beverages before and after faith-based activities or events can occur if physical distancing and good hand hygiene practices are followed. Self-serve areas are discouraged. Designated individuals to serve food and beverages is recommended. Food and beverages should not be shared.
- Avoid offering shared receptacles for liquid (e.g. holy water fonts, chalice, etc.).
- Provide hand sanitizer at the entry and throughout the facility.
- Shared objects (e.g. ceremonial objects, books, hymns, prayer mats, etc.) should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- Remove items from use that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- If touching of ceremonial objects is required for religious/spiritual reasons, then individuals must perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object and object cleaned and disinfected between uses.