

GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

Overview

Under current Chief Medical Officer of Health Orders, businesses and entities are required to:

- implement practices to minimize the risk of transmission of infection among attendees;
- provide procedures for rapid response if an attendee develops symptoms of illness;
- ensure that attendees maintain high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene; and
- comply, to the extent possible, with the [COVID-19 General Relaunch Guidance](#), this guidance, and any other applicable Alberta Health guidance found at: <https://www.alberta.ca/biz-connect.aspx>.

This document has been developed to support organizers at places of worship that wish to host services and faith-based activities in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among attendees (including congregants, workers, volunteers and the general public).

- An organizer can be a religious leader, director of worship, site resources or operations lead, or other individual who is charged with organizing faith-based activities.
- Faith-based activities include any services, activities, and events such as religious services, prayer services, devotions or study of religious books, ceremonies, charitable activities, etc.
- It should be noted that faith-based group activities have been the setting of large COVID-19 outbreaks, and it is critical that leaders/organizers take responsibility for protecting their communities by following all COVID-19 precautions carefully.

The advice in this document pertains to all faith-based activities that involve public gathering and occur on land or in buildings owned or rented by religious orders, societies or groups. This advice should be followed wherever possible.

There is no cap on capacity for places of worship during **regular worship services**, as long as there is a distance of at least 2 metres or appropriate barriers between members of different households (with the exception of [cohort families](#)). For all other services, events, and activities (e.g., weddings, funerals, meetings, youth groups, etc), current restrictions [Gatherings and Cohorts](#) must be followed.

- For **other services** such as weddings and funerals, please see the guidance documents for specific capacity restrictions that apply to these events.

This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed. Current information related to COVID-19 can be found: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-information.aspx>

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

General Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage and facilitate attendees to stay up to date with developments related to COVID-19.• Notify congregants of the steps being taken to prevent the risk of transmission, and the importance of their roles in these measures.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ COVID-19 signage should be posted in highly visible locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Help prevent the spread” posters are available. ▪ When possible, provide necessary information in languages that are preferred by congregants. ● All Albertans must follow CMOH Order 05-2020, which establishes legal requirements for quarantine and isolation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19; with a history of international travel in the last 14 days; or with close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days must remain at home. ● Places of worship and attendees should keep up to date with the masking requirements set at the local level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Masking guidance is available online. ● Have hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol content at facility entrances and exits, and throughout the place of worship. ● Consider suspending coat check services and use of communal coat racks to avoid staff and volunteers handling attendee’s personal items and storing them in close proximity to each other. ● Organizers should encourage congregants to use the online the Alberta Health Services COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool before every visit to the place of worship, and strongly discourage in-person worship when feeling unwell. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remind congregants that they must not attend in person if they are experiencing the most common symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, or sore throat). ● Organizers should thoroughly review all faith-based activities, rituals, and practices that occur in their place of worship to determine if they increase the risk of spreading COVID-19 amongst congregants, staff, and/or volunteers. ● To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee tests positive, operators should consider collecting the names and contact information of attendees. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing information is voluntary for attendees; ensure you obtain an individual’s consent and notify them about the purpose and legal authority for the collection. ○ The information will only be provided to Alberta Health Services if an attendee becomes a confirmed case for COVID.
<p>Alternate Service Options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider ways other than in-person attendance to include/support people who are at greater risk of severe disease, including people over 65 years of age and people with chronic medical conditions.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Organizer should ensure that extra precautions are implemented for these higher risk congregants who do choose to attend in person, such as designating times for individual worship or encouraging mask use for anyone who will be near that person.● Places of worship may consider options to limit the in-person attendance of congregants to, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Offering multiple, smaller services or events for segments of the congregation instead of single services or events attended by the entire congregation.○ Establishing caps on attendance at faith-based activities and events.○ Establishing a system for congregants to RSVP to attend specific services or events, to minimize overcrowding.○ Encouraging congregants to access the place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services.● Offering options for remote participation in faith-based activities (e.g. by telephone, closed circuit radio, video conference, video recordings) in conjunction with, or as a replacement for, in-person attendance.● Consider offering “drive-by”, “drive through”, or “drive in” services in which individuals participate in faith-based activities and receive services (e.g. blessings) without leaving their cars. Follow the Guidance for Drive In Events, as well as this guidance, for these services.● Religious leaders, staff, and volunteers who approach a vehicle to provide services to its occupants are encouraged to wear a mask if car windows are rolled down and if they are not able to maintain a 2 metre distance from the occupants.
Physical Distancing	<p>Physical distancing means maintaining at least 2 metres between attendees who are not from the same household (or cohort families) at all times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Organizers at places of worship should consider making adjustments in their facilities to support physical distancing amongst staff, volunteers, and attendees. This could include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Controlling and staggering entry into, and exit from, the place of worship before and after group activities or events (e.g. by dismissing individuals by household or section, rather than all at once).○ Establishing different points of entry and exit from high-traffic areas, where feasible to do so.○ Arranging or marking seating to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household or family cohort.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying areas, such as lobbies, where crowding and bottlenecks are common, and using volunteers, staff, or barriers to redirect people who may gather in these areas. ○ Directing the flow of people through the place of worship. ○ Ensuring that groups do not sit together unless they are from the same household or cohort family. ○ Giving verbal reminders to observe physical distancing. ○ Encouraging hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette while in the place of worship. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Washroom capacity should allow for distancing between guests. For example, consider closing alternate sinks or urinals. ● If physical distancing of 2 metres between members of different households/cohorts cannot be maintained at all times, the use of face masks by attendees is encouraged.
<p>Religious or Spiritual Practices and Rituals</p>	<p>Religious rituals that involve physical contact between individuals or objects, increase the likelihood of disease transmission and should be performed in an alternate fashion that minimizes physical contact.</p> <p>Operators are encouraged to follow the principles in this and the General Relaunch Guidance to modify faith and religious practices or rituals to minimize transmission. Below are some examples for some modified faith-based activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have congregants bring their own communion items to be blessed from their seat, and shared between their own cohort/household. ● Have congregants remove their shoes and place them in a small bag that is kept with them for the duration of the service to help avoid clusters of people at entrances and/or exits to places of worship. ● Have congregants bring their own prayer mat for individual or household/cohort to use; have markers on the floor to indicate placement of mats (2 metres apart). ● Have congregants complete ablutions at home; continue to encourage appropriate hand hygiene before and after entering the place of worship. ● Encourage congregants to use a non-medical mask in addition to their headscarf or veil.
<p>Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shaking hands, hugging, touching, or passing items between people should not occur, except between members of the same household or cohort family. Alternatives such as waving, nodding, or bowing should be encouraged. ● Everyone in the place of worship should follow proper respiratory etiquette practices at all times. These practices include coughing and

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	<p>sneezing into the elbow or a tissue, discarding tissues into a lined garbage bin, and washing hands afterwards.</p>
<p>Screening & Response Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post signs that instruct those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 not to enter. • Consider implementing active screening of attendees (where applicable) and staff for symptoms of fever, sore throat, cough, runny nose or difficulty breathing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizers may choose to use the Alberta Health Daily Checklist. ○ The Alberta Health Services COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool can be used by congregants. • Develop a rapid response plan that sets out a fast-action plan for operators when an attendee shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19. • Be familiar with and follow the rapid response plan if an attendee starts feeling symptoms. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Immediately isolating the attendee from others. ○ Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces that may have come into contact with the symptomatic attendee. ○ Requiring hand hygiene and masking of the attendee. ○ Ensuring the attendee isolates as soon as possible.
<p>Staff & Volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizers at places of worship should implement measures outlined in this document and the COVID-19 General Relaunch Guidance to protect staff and volunteers from the spread of COVID-19 onsite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintain up-to-date contact information for staff and volunteers. ○ Record who is working each day and attending group activities and events. ○ Provide information and training about appropriate physical distancing, facility-specific risk-reduction measures, and proper respiratory and hygiene practices. ○ Provide non-medical masks if staff and volunteers are unable to maintain 2-metre physical distance from congregants.
<p>Cleaning and Disinfecting</p>	<p>In addition to the cleaning and disinfecting recommendations found in the General Relaunch Guidance, organizers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement procedures for increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of high traffic areas, common areas and washrooms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintain cleaning logs and an inventory of supplies. ○ Enhance the cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch/shared surfaces such as elevator buttons, railings, door handles, microphones, podiums, ceremonial objects, etc.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Washroom sanitation and supervision should be enhanced. ○ Provide a process for attendees to report sanitation and distancing concerns. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facility personnel or the organizer should address concerns in a timely manner. • Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces as per AHS' Public Health Guidelines for Environmental Cleaning of Public Facilities during Respiratory Illnesses in the Community. • Water fountains or water coolers may remain open and should be cleaned and disinfected frequently. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where disposable water cups are provided, place a lined garbage receptacle close by for any used cups.
<p>Singing, Live Music & Performances</p>	<p>Congregational Singing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregation singing is strongly discouraged and should not occur whenever possible, at this time. • If singing is required for religious reasons, all participants should wear face masks at all times and remain at least 2 metres apart from those outside their household or cohort, and adequate ventilation in the room should be ensured. <p>Choirs & Performances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith-based choirs are allowed; they are expected to follow the guidance for singing and vocal performance. • In indoor settings, groups should not sing or play wind instruments for more than 30 minutes at a time, with a 10 minute break afterwards to allow for air exchange in the room. • Singers/conductors should wear masks indoors both when singing and not singing. • A solo singer or vocalist can perform without a mask if alone in a dedicated space or room (e.g., a constructed acrylic plastic room). • Instrumental music is an available option for live performances; groups or individuals are expected to follow the guidance for instrumental music. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wind instrument musicians should cover the bell of their instrument with thin, tightly woven fabric covers while playing.
<p>Food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If food or drink must be provided as part of a faith-based ritual (e.g. communion or langar), the following precautions must be taken to prevent the risk of infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food or drink must be served to congregants in pre-packaged or individual portions by a small number of designated individuals. ○ Food and drink containers or utensils (e.g. chalices or plates) should not be shared or passed between congregants.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical contact between the designated serving individuals and congregants must not occur while serving food or drink (e.g. placing food in a congregants' mouths). Instead, the server can place the individual food or drink portion in a congregant's outstretched hand, or on a table for the congregant to pick up. ○ The designated serving individuals should wash or sanitize hands immediately before serving and should wear a clean, properly-fitted non-medical mask for the duration of time spent serving. ● If food is desired before or after faith-based activities or events, businesses or groups who provide the food are required to follow the Food Regulation and Food Retail and Foodservices Code and existing occupational health and safety requirements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food service providers should also follow the COVID-19 General Relaunch Guidance and the Restaurants, Cafes, Pubs, and Bars Guidance. ● Attendees may bring their own food and beverages. Food and beverages should not be shared between households.
<p>Shared items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do not hand out or share items that cannot be cleaned and sanitized before and after each use (e.g., books, hymns, prayer mats, pipes, and programs). ● Encourage congregants to bring their own items and avoid sharing them with others. ● Consider using projection or audio-visual systems or individual, pre-printed sheets to share information. ● Hand-held microphones should not be shared. This includes between readers and other speakers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Podium or stand microphones can be shared, but should not be touched by speakers ● Do not offer shared receptacles for liquid (e.g. holy water fonts). If washing facilities are required, they should be supplemented by hand hygiene products. ● If it is required for religious or spiritual reasons, touching of ceremonial objects (e.g., statues, religious symbols, rings) 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 pass donation collection plates or containers between congregants. Alternatives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A designated area to place offerings/donations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offerings/donations collected from patrons should left untouched for 24 hours. ○ Online offerings/donations.

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Children’s programs and other facility uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faith-based classes for children may operate with adherence to the Guidance for Day Camps.• Operators may offer child minding during faith-based programs or classes. Operators should refer to the Guidance for Daycare/Out of School.
Other uses of the facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Places of worship that freely offer or rent spaces within their facilities to other groups or businesses must ensure that these groups or businesses abide by all orders of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and all applicable public health guidance documents.• The operator is responsible for ensuring that any parties renting or using space in the place of worship have plans and mechanisms in place to prevent infection transmission amongst their attendees.