

Places of Worship

This document is intended for employers, workers and participants of places of worship, as an overview of potential hazards in the workplace due to COVID-19.

In all cases, guidance from local public health authorities must be followed and general COVID-19 prevention practices should be implemented, as outlined in: www.ccohs.ca/pdfs/covid-general.pdf

Consider the Risks

Gathering for worship, prayers, rites, visitations and ceremonies (i.e. weddings, funerals) may involve close contact with other people and frequently touched surfaces/objects. The chance of COVID-19 spreading at these events depends on a variety of factors including the number and characteristics of attendees, the characteristics of the setting and the activities taking place, and the mitigation measures put in place by employers to reduce risk of virus spread.

Each gathering or event may have unique situations. Individually assess the risk for each activity and interaction. It may not be possible to offer all services. Consider the following:

- What activities will your workers do (e.g., screening of attendees, cleaning and disinfecting, etc.)?
- How many people will be attending?
- Will the event be offered to multiple groups or members over time (e.g., overlapping of groups, back-to-back service)?
- Is the event scheduled for a limited number of pre-registered members or can members drop-in?
- Will members have close contact (i.e. within 2 metres) with one another?
- Will members have prolonged or cumulative interactions with others?
- Is the setting indoors or outdoors? Is there adequate ventilation if indoors?
- Will members have frequent contact with high-touch surfaces/objects (e.g., door handles, light switches, sink faucets, toilet handles)?
- Are there shared items between members?
- Can extra equipment be moved or removed from the area?
- What activities will be offered? Do they involve loud verbal instructions and music (shouting, yelling, singing)?
- Are food and beverages being served?
- How long will the event last?
- Will the event be held at one or multiple locations?
- Does the size of the facility allow for physical distancing measures?
- What other activities take place at your facility (e.g., daycare, services to vulnerable individuals, children's programs, fundraisers, etc.)?



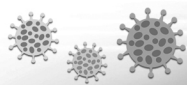
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Communication

- Inform all workers and members in advance about if there are changes to policies or practices including reduced hours or restricted access (e.g. washrooms, lockers, etc.).
- Information can be shared online, through advertisements, with notices at the front doors, and verbally by workers.
- Post signs for workers and others not to enter the facility if they may be sick, suspect they may have been exposed, or have travelled outside of Canada within the past 14 days.
- Post signs throughout the facility to encourage physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting of equipment, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- Make sure that all communications are suitable for people's age, ability, reading level, and language preferences.
- Work with external contactors, vendors, etc. to meet your COVID-19 safety requirements.
- Consider a website or phone-based advanced booking system to help manage the number of members on site and to reduce waiting.
- Send any necessary forms, waivers, etc. electronically.
- Ask members to arrive no more than 15 minutes before service start time and to leave promptly afterward.
- Help members understand that protective measures and reduced services are necessary, and that their experience might be different. Ask them to be considerate of workers and other members.

Screening

- Consider asking screening questions before workers, members, etc. enter using a checklist from your local public health authority or have them complete a questionnaire.
- Symptoms can vary person to person and within different age groups.
- Older adults, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, people of any age who are immunocompromised, and those living with obesity are at risk for more severe disease and outcomes from COVID-19. The most common symptoms are:
 - New or worsening cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Temperature equal to or over 38°C
 - Feeling feverish
 - Chills
 - Fatigue or weakness
 - Muscle or body aches
 - New loss of smell or taste
 - Headache
 - Gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting)
 - Feeling very unwell
 - Skin changes or rashes (young children)
- Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to others. Some people with COVID-19 have mild or no symptoms.
- Record the names and contact information of all workers and members, vendors contractors, etc. in the facility to assist with contact tracing by the local public health authority if needed. Make sure that privacy is protected, and that the information is stored in a safe and secure manner.
- Establish procedures for people who does not pass screening or become sick while at the facility. They should wear a wear a mask (if not already doing so), return home, preferable not by public transit, and call their health care provider or local public health authority for further instruction.



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Physical Distancing, Engineering and Administrative and Other Controls

- Allow workers to work from home whenever possible.
- Do not exceed the maximum gathering and event limits for your jurisdiction.
- Set occupancy limits for the event to allow available room for spacing people at least 2 meters apart.
- Host smaller events in larger rooms/spaces where possible.
- Consider offering additional but smaller sized group services, or holding services outside, to support physical distancing.
- Consider grouping (cohorting) individuals and families. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different individuals/families.
- Consider modifying or suspending certain religious activities, such as Communion.
- Do not hold group nursery and children's activities. Children should remain with their parents or guardians.
- Reconfigure parking lots to limit congregation points and ensure proper separation of employees (e.g., closing every other parking space).
- If possible, use a dedicated entrance/exit propped open by an automated or manual method by the facility.
- Eliminate lines or queues if possible and encourage people to stay at least 2 metres apart by providing signs or markers to help attendees maintain the appropriate social distance.
- Install physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass installed higher than head height), as well as floor markings, and other visual cues where needed.
- Establish one-way routes where appropriate within the facilities to include washrooms. Restrict access to areas of the facility that members do not need to go.
- Change seating layout or availability of seating so that people can remain least 2 metres apart. Block off rows or sections of seating in order to promote distancing.
- Remove any extra equipment, increase the spacing between them, or take them out of service using barriers or signs.
- Limit any non-essential visitors, volunteers and activities involving external groups or organizations during the event.
- Members should be permitted only for the duration of the event and leave promptly when the event is over. Discourage members from congregating in the lobby, hallways or parking lot.
- Elevator occupancy should be limited to allow for physical distancing to be maintained. All elevators should be sanitized frequently.
- Escalators should have signage explaining current procedures to ensure safety including appropriate physical distancing while in use.
- Prioritize outdoor activities where physical distancing can be maintained as much as possible.
- If providing portable toilets, also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked throughout the duration of the event. If possible, provide hand sanitizer stations that are touch-free.
- Ensure the facility is adequately stocked with supplies for handwashing, including soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
- Allow adequate time to disinfect any shared equipment between each user.
- Consider additional measures to protect workers and attendees with risk factors for severe illness from COVID-19, such as offering online attendance options to help reduce the number of attendees.
- Close shared coat check areas. Ask members to bring their own items and keep with them (e.g. coats, bags, shoes, prayer mats, prayer beads, etc.).
- Discourage unnecessary physical contact such as handshakes, hugs and high fives.
- Reduce noise levels (e.g., turn down/off music) so people can speak as quietly as possible and avoid shouting/yelling.



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- Discourage chanting, yelling or singing.
- Singing, especially with groups in settings with poor ventilation (e.g., recirculated air), is considered a high-risk activity. Consider having a soloist sing (using a barrier such as plexiglass) or providing recorded or instrumental music. Singers that are members of the same household are at less risk and could sing together while distanced from others.
- Separate playing wind or brass instruments by 2- meters from other persons and separated by a physical barrier (e.g., plexiglass shield).
- Consider using posters or projecting information on a screen instead of handouts. Modify how financial contributions are collected. Consider electronic transfers, or a collection box for envelopes or cheques. Do not pass a common plate. If collecting envelopes or cheques, have workers and wash their hands after handling paper or cash.
- Consider offering alternative methods to provide services such as virtual gatherings or counselling by phone, drive-in or dedicated services to people who are at risk for more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19 (e.g., older adults, those with chronic medical conditions, are immunocompromised, or living with obesity).
- If offering alternate services, such as a drive-in service, be sure to maintain physical distancing (including having vehicles 2 metres apart), and that any available washrooms are cleaned and disinfected often.

Ventilation and Aerosol Transmission

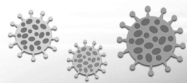
- When possible, consider holding an event/activity outdoors.
- Ensure that ventilation systems of indoor spaces operate properly.
- Increase introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to workers or attendees.
- Powerful portable cooling fans might increase the spread of COVID-19 in enclosed spaces. Use other ways to keep rooms cool, such as adjusting building ventilation systems, and air conditioning units.
- Ventilation systems should be adjusted to:
 - Increase filtration efficiency to the highest level appropriate for the system.
 - Increase fresh air flow/percentage of outdoor air (increase % of outdoor air in HVAC air supply, open windows and doors, etc.).
 - Limit use of demand-controlled ventilation; keep system running at the optimal setting.
 - Explore the use of portable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration units.
- Consult an HVAC professional before making changes to the ventilation system.
- Reduce noise levels so employees and members can speak as quietly as possible, in order to avoid spread of the virus through shouting/yelling.

Personal Hygiene

- Hand wash and sanitizer stations should be well stocked and easy to find near the entrance and other appropriate areas (e.g., pews, tables, podiums, etc.). Make sure they are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Everyone should perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving the facility, after using washrooms, before and after eating and drinking, before and after touching shared equipment and surfaces, and after contact with another person.
- Encourage good respiratory etiquette. Everyone should sneeze or cough into a tissue or into the bend of their arm, instead of their hands.
- Encourage the use of tissues so prevent the spread of bodily fluids. Ensure everyone immediately disposes of used tissues in lined garbage cans and that they follow-up with hand hygiene.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Depending on the type of surface, viruses can live on objects and surfaces for a few hours to days. Develop a cleaning and disinfection program with a schedule and checklists for all areas and equipment before, during and after the event.



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- Clean and disinfect commonly touched objects and surfaces such as floors (when used for prayer), counters, chairs, handles, doorknobs, light switches, faucets/taps, sanitizer dispensers, diaper-changing stations, water bottle refill stations, linens, books, podium, arts and crafts, bingo cards, religious objects, religious books, and any protective barriers.
- Place cleaning supplies and lined garbage cans accessible for cleaning.
- Shared spaces such as lunchrooms and washrooms should also be cleaned and disinfected more often.
- Remove soft furnishings and objects that cannot be easily cleaned (e.g., hymn books, instruments, ceremonial objects, etc.) that cannot be easily cleaned.
- Clean and disinfect the work area before and after contractors complete their work.
- Discouraging the use of linen to minimize exposure to contamination.
- Where laundry results, do not shake dirty laundry. Use disposable gloves and perform hand hygiene after handling laundry. Clean and disinfect hampers and bins.
- Follow the occupational health and safety requirements for your jurisdiction including following the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) about hazardous products in the workplace.
- Provide workers with training on cleaning and disinfecting procedures, adequate supplies, and access to required personal protective equipment, if needed.
- Follow the product's safety data sheet or manufacturer's instructions for use (e.g., wear gloves, use in well-ventilated area, amount and duration of product needed to kill germs).
- Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol before and after personal protective equipment (PPE) is used.
- Place cleaning supplies and lined garbage cans where it is accessible to workers.
- Clean visibly dirty surfaces before disinfecting.
- Damp cleaning methods (damp clean cloths and wet mops) are preferred over dry methods (dusting and sweeping). Damp methods of cleaning are less likely to distribute virus droplets into the air.
- Use dedicated re-useable cleaning materials (towels, sponges, mops, etc.) that can be washed using laundry soap and then dried completely.
- Put used disposable cleaning items (e.g., mop heads, cloths) in a lined garbage bin before disposing of them with regular waste. Reusable cleaning items can be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C).
- Use a household or commercial disinfectant to destroy or inactivate the virus.
 - Use a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN). This number means that it has been approved for use in Canada.
 - Read and follow manufacturer's instructions for the safe use of products (e.g., wear gloves, use in well-ventilated area, allow enough contact time for disinfectant to kill germs based on the product being used).
 - If approved household or commercial disinfectant products are not available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of 5 mL of bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and 250 mL of water. Test surfaces before using a bleach solution. Bleach can be corrosive. Follow instructions for safe handling of bleach.
 - If the use of liquids can be withstood, disinfect high-touch electronic devices (e.g., touch screens, pin pads, keyboards) with alcohol or disinfectant wipes.
- Clean so that when the surface is wiped, the surface still appears wet.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning regularly used electronics like keyboards, tablets and smartboards. If electronics can withstand the use of liquids, disinfect them with 70% alcohol, like alcohol prep wipes.
- Dispose of single-use tissues, wipes, gloves, and other cleaning materials in a plastic lined waste container.
- Replace garbage bins with no-touch receptacles or remove lids that require contact to open.
- Empty garbage at least daily. Use disposable gloves when handling garbage.
- Follow up with hand hygiene.



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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Continue to use PPE for existing occupational safety hazards and emergencies as directed by applicable laws and your employer.
- Situations where PPE may be considered for protection from COVID-19 include:
 - Wearing gloves when cleaning as recommended by the product's safe work instructions or safety data sheet.
 - Wearing disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids.
 - Wearing PPE if direct care is unavoidable (e.g., first aid in a medical emergency).
- If workers need to wear PPE, train them on how to wear, remove, work with, and care for the equipment, and to understand its limitations.
- Clean and disinfect any shared PPE before you wear it.
- Wash hands before wearing and after removing PPE.

Non-Medical Masks or Face Coverings

- The wearing of non-medical masks or cloth face coverings is an additional personal practice that can help to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wear a non-medical mask when:
 - You are in public and you might come into contact with others.
 - You are in an indoor space with people from outside your immediate household.
 - Advised by your local public health authority.
- Children under the age of 2 should not wear a non-medical mask or face covering. Children between the ages of 2 and 5 may be able to wear a mask if supervised. Children older than the age of 5 should follow the same advice for adults on when to wear a non-medical mask or face covering.
- Ensure [everyone wears their mask correctly](#), making sure the nose and mouth are covered. People should be instructed to avoid touching the mask while wearing it.
- Be aware that non-medical masks have limitations, and improper mask use and disposal can increase the risk of infection.
- People should be instructed to change their mask if it becomes wet or soiled. They may wish to bring a second mask in a clean paper bag, envelope, or container that does not trap moisture. They should store reusable soiled masks in a separate bag or container. They should not touch the outside of the mask while removing it and wash their hands before putting on and after taking off the mask.
- Members with a disability are not required to provide written proof that they cannot wear a mask; however, you should have the right to provide service in different ways to accommodate their medical needs while protecting workers. Consider offering curbside, individual or virtual services.
- Workers who have health related concerns associated with wearing a mask should get guidance from their healthcare provider.
- Workers should be instructed [on the differences between and when to use](#) respirators, surgical masks and non-medical masks.
- Do not allow the mask to be a hazard to other activities, such as getting caught on moving machinery or equipment.

Food and Beverage

- Discourage food and drink sharing. Shut off water fountains or replace them with water bottle refill stations. Each person should have their own labelled water bottle.
- If food and/or drinks are being served, consider that people sharing utensils and congregating around food service areas can pose a risk.
- Limit any sharing of food, tools, equipment, or supplies by workers.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals remain at least 2 metres apart when waiting in line to order or pick up.



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- Limit the number of people serving and have servers wear a non-medical mask or face covering.
- Remind members and servers to clean their hands before getting food or drinks.
- If a cafeteria or group dining room is used, serve individually plated meals or grab-and-go options, and hold activities in separate areas.
- Avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars, and drink stations. Consider having pre-packaged boxes or bags for each member.
- Use disposable dishes and cutlery. If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher.
- Individuals should wash their hands before putting on and after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.
- Follow all food safety precautions related to temperature and storage of hot and cold foods. Clean any common items with disinfectant wipes between each member use and/or make disinfectant wipes available to members.
- Discard any left over open, thawed, prepared, cooked, or ready-to-eat foods.
- Cover, label, and protect any foods that will be stored followed the event (E.g., temperature, humidity, cleanliness, and pests).
- Alternatively, ask members to bring their own food and drinks and avoid sharing snack bowls or using hands to eat from the same bowl.
- Encourage members to remain seated when eating or drinking except while:
 - Entering or exiting the area or while moving to their table or seat,
 - Placing, or picking up an order,
 - Going to or returning from a washroom,
 - Lining up to do anything described above, or
 - Where necessary for the purpose of health and safety.
- Encourage members to wear non-medical masks or face coverings except when eating or drinking.

External Service Providers

- For visits by external services such as contractors:
 - Communicate with service providers about your COVID-19 safety requirements before their visit, and work with them to meet their safety requirements.
 - Maintain physical distancing as much as possible, minimize exposure to workers and attendees, wear non-medical masks, and provide hand washing facilities.
 - Clean and disinfect the work area before and after the service provider does their work.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a Crisis Centre in your area.

<https://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/>



For further information on COVID-19, refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada
<https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus>



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Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.