

# Renfrew County and District Health Unit

## COVID-19: Places of Worship Guidance Document

All places of worship must adhere to the following requirements:

- Maintaining a 2-metre distance between all persons.
- The use of masks is mandatory in all indoor public places.
- Eye protection is required for individuals who come within 2 meters of an unmasked individual.
- Limit singing and loud speaking.
- Avoid opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly via surfaces and objects, including objects that may be used in rituals or ceremonies.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection.

### A. Preparation/ Screening

#### **Establish Policies for Health Screening**

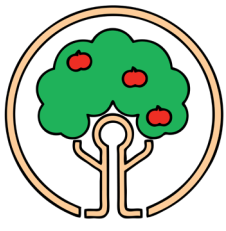
Staff and volunteers must be screened upon arrival before starting their duties. Persons who become ill while at the service must go home right away and self-isolate. Call a health care provider for further evaluation if necessary.

#### **Training**

Staff and volunteers must always use a mask/face covering while providing services. Instruct staff and volunteers on proper hand hygiene techniques and respiratory etiquette; when to use masks, proper use of a mask, and how to clean fabric masks or discard single use masks appropriately.

#### **Print and Post Signs**

- COVID-19 health self-assessment sign (called passive screening) should be posted at all entrances.
- Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 should not enter the building.
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette signs should be posted in high visibility areas.
- Consider alternative options for service delivery to involve individuals unable to attend in person, including online services.
- Plan how to ensure physical distancing – ensure your space is set up in a manner that allows 2m distance between individuals or households.
- Mark off seating areas to promote physical distancing. Remove seating if possible, to accommodate physical distancing requirements.
- Capacity limits for places of worship during service are based on the number of people that can maintain a physical distance of 2 meters from every other person in the premise. For social gatherings associated with a religious service, capacity limits are 25 people for indoor gatherings and 100 for outdoor gatherings.



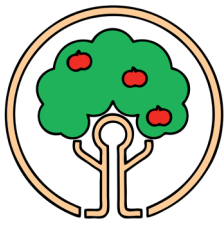
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- Control movement into and out of your facility, and within the space to ensure a two-metre distance can be maintained. Discourage movement against the flow of people moving in the space. It may be necessary to mark off two metre distances outside and/or in a vestibule if it is anticipated that lines will form. Consider having someone control departing of the space by sending out groups row by row.
- Drinking fountains should be turned off or disconnected.
- Discontinue use of holy water stoup.
- All staff, volunteers and attendees are required to wear a mask to reduce the risk of transmission while inside a place of worship.

### B. During Services

- Remind everyone not to attend the service in person if they are experiencing [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- Modify activities before and during the service to ensure a 2m distance between leaders, staff, volunteers and attendees at all times.
- Regular childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner consistent with the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps.
- Cohort 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.
- Respiratory droplets and aerosols generated during singing, loud speech or use of wind instruments may travel further than two metres. The following practices are recommended:
  - Spoken responses should be in a low voice. Leaders should use microphones unless the space is very small. Consider using audio or video recordings instead of live singing or wind or brass instrumental music.
  - Group/choir singing is strongly discouraged. However, if more than one person is singing, limit the number of people singing to the fewest possible and ensure there is 2m distance between them.
- With instrumental music (e.g., piano, organ, but not wind instruments), if more than one is being played, ensure physical distancing.
- Anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments should be 2 metres from anyone else or separated by an impermeable barrier.
- Encourage attendees to bring their own non-medical mask/face covering that covers their mouth, nose and chin. Physical distancing is still required even when using a mask.
- Avoid any physical contact. Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow or wave (e.g., during in-service greetings).
- Allow for adequate cleaning and disinfecting high traffic areas between services.
- Suspend or adapt the sharing or distribution of material or objects, which may include but is not limited to books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls, water etc.
  - Perform hand hygiene prior to distribution or sharing
  - Consider leaving objects or material on a table for individuals to pick up and/or



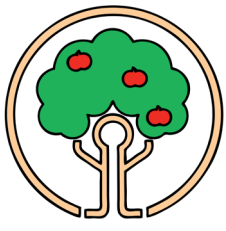
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- Limit the number of individuals who have contact with items and material and returned/accessed items are disinfected or not re-used immediately.
- Use printed service leaflets and discard after the service or use projection/audio-visual systems. Avoid sharing microphones or disinfect them between uses.
- Rituals involving close physical contact (e.g., baptisms) or shared items (e.g., receptacles, washing facilities) are strongly discouraged at this time. If they must be performed, considerations need to be made to provide them safely such as use of appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Discontinue use of holy water rites.
- Do not pass offering plates. Consider a designated area to offer donations or use of online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines.
- Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with hand sanitizer stations (at least 70% alcohol). Avoid access to hand sanitizer by young children without supervision.
- Encourage good respiratory etiquette. Cover mouth and nose with elbow when coughing or sneezing or use a tissue then discard tissue in waste bin. Wash or sanitize hands afterwards.
- Suspend or adapt all social gatherings, including those that occur before or after the service, and food services. Social gatherings are subject to gathering limits and social distancing. Capacity limits on social gatherings are different than the limits permitted for religious services, rites and ceremonies.

### C. Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Disinfectants kill germs on surfaces. Remove surface dirt or debris first for the disinfectant to be effective.
- Most regular household cleaning products are effective at eliminating the coronavirus.
  - Cleaning and disinfection products should have an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada. Check the expiry dates of products and always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Keep products away from children.
  - See [hard surface disinfectants and sanitizers](#) for a list of approved products.
- Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces, and according to the manufacturer's instructions. Alternatively, chlorine bleach solutions may be used for disinfection. Prepare fresh bleach solution daily.
- Educate staff on proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact time (amount of time that the product will need to remain wet on a surface to achieve disinfection). Understand safety precautions and requirement for use of mask and gloves.
- Ensure adequate ventilation when using products (e.g., open windows, doors, or use fans).



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- Ensure ventilation systems are operating properly and replace filters as scheduled or sooner.
- Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces (e.g., pews, chairs, tables, toilets, sinks, door handles, light switches, remote controls) twice a day or more, and when visibly dirty.
- Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towel.
- Wash hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning.

**Note:** Disinfectant wipes may have combined cleaning and disinfection in one solution, but depending on how dirty the surface is, it may need to be pre-cleaned as disinfectants are not effective when dirt is present. Check instructions on the product's label.

### D. Weddings and Funerals

- If a wedding or funeral is occurring indoors, the capacity of participants is limited to the number of people that can maintain a distance of 2 meters from every other person.
- For social gatherings associated with a wedding or funeral, capacity is limited to 25 people indoors or 100 people outdoors.

#### For more information

You can access the Ministry of Health at

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/advice\\_religious\\_services.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/advice_religious_services.pdf)

Should you want to discuss any of the guideline, please feel free to contact our office at 613-735-8654, extension 555 or [www.rcdhu.com](http://www.rcdhu.com).

Source: Adapted from Ottawa Public Health.

**Revised: October 15, 2021**