

GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

Overview

Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Order 25-2020 requires businesses and entities 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;
- comply, to the extent possible, with any applicable Alberta Health guidance found at: alberta.ca/biz-connect.aspx.

Where any part of this guidance is inconsistent or in conflict with enhanced or stronger public health restrictions set out in another CMOH Order, the enhanced or stronger public health measures would prevail. Operators are also required to follow the [General Operational Guidance](#).

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 led, 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 gatherings and occur on land or in buildings owned or rented by religious orders, societies or groups. The guidance provided outlines public health and infection prevention and control measures specific to these settings and activities.

This guidance document describes the difference in restrictions for *high case regions* and *low case regions*:

- *High case regions are those that have had an active case rate of 50 cases per 100,000 people and 30 or more active cases, at any point while Orders 19-2021 and 20-2021 are in effect.*

Please refer to the [COVID-19 Regional Active Cases map](#) to determine if your region has high case restrictions or low case restrictions in effect.

In all settings and regions, it is important that measures are implemented to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. This includes, but is not limited to ensuring: capacity limits, physical distancing, barrier use (where appropriate), proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, enhanced and appropriate cleaning and disinfecting, records management and building maintenance (e.g., ventilation).

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COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

HIGH CASE REGIONS	
Attendance Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship services at places of worship are limited to 15 in-person attendees, both indoors and outdoors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The religious leader leading the faith service is not considered as part of the 15-person limit • Physical distancing of 2 metres' must be maintained between households at all times. • Drive-in, virtual or online services are strongly recommended. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are no capacity limits for drive-in services, provided all attendees remain in their vehicles at all times and vehicles are separated by 2 metres.
Performances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performances are permitted if they occur as part of a religious service led by a religious leader. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Performers and support persons (including but not limited to singers, musicians, sound and lighting technicians, and ushers) are counted as part of the maximum attendance limit. • Performances at a place of worship that do not occur as part of a religious service are not permitted at this time.
Events, Gatherings and Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious gatherings or meetings outside of regular worship services are not permitted indoors and are limited to 5 individuals in outdoor settings, with 2 metres' distance between people from different households. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizers are encouraged to hold meetings, gatherings and events virtually. • Weddings and funerals in places of worship must follow the Weddings and Funerals Guidance.
LOW CASE REGIONS	
Attendance Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person attendance for worship services at places of worship is limited to 15% of fire code occupancy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The religious leader leading the faith service is not considered as part of the 15%. • Physical distancing of 2 metres' must be maintained between households at all times. • Drive-in, virtual or online services are strongly recommended.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are no capacity limits for drive-in services, provided all attendees remain in their vehicles at all times and vehicles are separated by 2 metres.
Performances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Performances are permitted if they occur as part of a religious service led by a religious leader. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Performers and support persons (including but not limited to singers, musicians, sound and lighting technicians, and ushers) are counted as part of the maximum attendance limit. ● Performances at a place of worship that do not occur as part of a religious service must be outdoors and must follow the current restrictions on performing arts.
Events, Gatherings and Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Religious gatherings or meetings outside of regular worship services are not permitted indoors and are limited to 10 individuals in outdoor settings, with 2 metres' distance between people from different households. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizers are encouraged to hold meetings, gatherings and events virtually. ● Weddings and funerals in places of worship must follow the Weddings and Funerals Guidance.

ADVICE FOR ALL PLACES OF WORSHIP

General Advice for All Places of Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All attendees at a place of worship must maintain 2 metres distance at all times from people who are not part of their household. ● Attendees are required to mask in all indoor public places and indoor workplaces unless they qualify for an exception. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Faith leaders and other speakers may remove their masks while speaking if there is a distance of 2 metres between the speaking location and other congregants. The speaker must put their mask back on once finished speaking. ○ Faith leaders and speakers must follow hand hygiene measures when removing and donning their masks. ● Place hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol in convenient locations throughout the place of worship ● Enhance cleaning and disinfecting practices as described in the General Operational Guidance. ● Everyone in the place of worship should follow proper respiratory etiquette practices at all times. These practices include coughing and sneezing into the elbow or a tissue, discarding tissues into a lined garbage bin, and washing hands afterwards.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Operators should remind all attendees to use the Alberta Health Daily Checklist to check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 before attending the place of worship. <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). • To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee tests positive or an outbreak is identified, the operator should consider collecting the names and contact information for all attendees. For more instructions, refer to the General Operational Guidance. • The operator should have detailed plans for a rapid response if an attendee becomes symptomatic while at the place of worship. For more information on what this should include, see the General Operational Guidance.
<p>Alternate Service Options</p>	<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. • To meet attendance limits, places of worship may want to consider: <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 a system for congregants to RSVP to attend specific services or events, to ensure they are within restriction limits. ○ Encouraging congregants to access the place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services. • Drive-in service organizers must ensure the service adheres to this guidance and to the Guidance for Drive-In Events. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attendees must park their vehicles 2 metres apart and must not leave their vehicles except to use the washroom.. ○ Religious leaders, staff, and volunteers who approach a vehicle to provide services to its occupants must wear a mask if car windows are rolled down and if they are not able to maintain a 2 metre distance from the occupants.

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<p>Religious or Spiritual Practices and Rituals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Organizers should thoroughly review all faith-based activities, rituals, and practices that occur in their place of worship and, if any of these activities are identified as a potential risk for COVID-19 spread, implement mitigation measures. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have congregants bring their own communion items to be blessed from their seat, and shared between their own 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 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. ○ Adapt rituals that involve physical contact between individuals to minimize or eliminate physical contact. • Shaking hands, hugging, touching, or passing items between people should not occur, except between members of the same household. Alternatives such as waving, nodding, or bowing should be encouraged.
<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.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. ○ Offerings/donations collected from patrons should be left untouched for 24 hours. • Online offerings/donations.
<p>Food and Beverages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendees at a place of worship are not permitted to consume food during a religious service, meeting, or gathering unless it for a faith-based ritual (e.g. communion or langar). • If food or drink must be provided as part of a faith-based ritual, 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. ○ 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 should use a tong to place the individual food or drink portion in a congregant's outstretched hand, or on a table for the congregant to pick up. ○ If, for religious reasons, the faith leader must place food into the mouth of the congregant directly (e.g., communion), it is strongly recommended the faith leader wear a face mask and perform hand hygiene before and after providing service to each congregant. ○ 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 must follow the Guidance for Food Service and Sales.
<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 masks at all times and remain at least 2 metres apart from those outside their household, and adequate ventilation in the room should be ensured.

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	<p>Choirs & Performances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If required for religious reasons, faith-based choirs are allowed; they are counted as part of the capacity limit at the place of worship and are expected to follow current restrictions.• 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.• A solo singer or vocalist can perform without a mask if alone in a separate room.• Instrumental music is an available option for live performances; groups or individuals should follow available guidance.• Wind instrument musicians should cover the bell of their instrument with thin, tightly woven fabric covers while playing.
<p>Children’s programs and youth groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subject to gathering restrictions, operators may offer child minding during faith-based programs or classes. Operators should refer to the Guidance for Daycare/Out of School.• Subject to gathering restrictions, faith-based classes for children may operate with adherence to the Guidance for Day Camps.• Youth groups are not permitted at this time.
<p>Other uses of the facility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Places of worship are not permitted to offer or rent spaces within their facilities to other groups or businesses.• 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.

This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

Last Revised: May 2021