

STAGE 2: 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.

In all settings, 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).

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

General Advice for Places of Worship and Faith Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-person attendance for worship services at places of worship is limited to 1/3 of fire code occupancy.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The religious leader leading the faith service is not counted towards the capacity limit. ● Outdoor in-person religious services must follow public outdoor gathering restrictions (up to 150 attendees with 2 metres' distance between households). ● Drive-in, virtual or online services are strongly recommended. ● 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 locations throughout the place of worship. ● Enhance cleaning and disinfecting practices as described in the General Operational Guidance. ● Operators should remind all attendees to use the Alberta Health Daily Checklist to screen 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>Events, Gatherings and Meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Religious gatherings are not permitted indoors. ● Meetings outside of regular worship services are permitted indoors, as long as 2 metres' distance is maintained between households and masks are worn at all times.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizers are encouraged to hold meetings, gatherings and events virtually or outdoors. ● Weddings and funerals in places of worship must follow the Weddings and Funerals 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 must adhere to CMOH Orders, this guidance and to the Guidance for Drive-In Events. <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. ○ 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 metres' distance from the occupants.
<p>Religious or Spiritual Practices and Rituals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizers should review all faith-based activities, rituals, and practices and adjust them as needed to minimize physical contact, support 2 metres' physical distancing, and reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. ○ If prayer mats are used, have markers on the floor to indicate placement of mats (2 metres apart). ○ Encourage appropriate hand hygiene before and after entering the place of worship.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly discourage shaking hands, hugging, touching, or passing of items between people from different households. Encourage alternatives such as waving, nodding, or bowing.
<p>Shared items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If items are needed for worship (e.g., bibles, prayer mats) encourage congregants to bring their own and not share them outside of their household. ● 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). ● Avoid passing objects between households (e.g., microphones, collection plates). ● 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. ● Touching of ceremonial objects (e.g., statues, religious symbols, rings) may occur if hand hygiene is performed before and after touching the object. Avoid kissing or embracing these objects.
<p>Food and Beverages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If food or drink must be provided as part of a faith-based ritual or religious service, 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 individual portions. ○ Food and drink containers or utensils (e.g. chalices or plates) should not be shared or passed between congregants. ○ People serving food or drink should wash or sanitize hands immediately before serving and wear a mask even in outdoor settings. ○ If, for religious reasons, the server must place food directly into the mouth of the congregant (e.g., communion), it is strongly recommended the server perform hand hygiene before and after providing service to each congregant, or use tongs to provide the food. ● Communal meals or gatherings that are held before or after services must follow current social gathering restrictions. Food service 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">• Faith-based choirs and musical performances are allowed; performers are counted as part of the capacity limit at the place of worship and are expected to follow Guidance for Performing Arts.○ Choirs and musicians must mask when practicing indoors, and are encouraged to mask and maintain 2 metres' distance from one another when performing indoors.○ 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.
<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 Camps.• Faith-based classes for children may operate so long as 2 metres' distance is maintained between participants at all times.• Youth groups are permitted at this time and must follow the restrictions for recreation in the Guidance for Sport, Fitness and Recreation.
<p>Other uses of the facility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Places of worship are permitted to offer or rent spaces within their facilities to other groups or businesses, so long as those groups/businesses follow the applicable COVID-19 guidance.

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

Last Revised: June 2021