

COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines: Places of Worship

Last updated June 12, 2020

This purpose of this document is to provide local public health guidance to faith-based organizations reopening in Halton. This document does not replace guidance from the Province, and is subject to the staged approach to reopening in the [Framework for Reopening our Province](#).

Screen for COVID-19-like Symptoms

- Screen for COVID-19-like symptoms upon entry to the facility.
 - Display [posters](#) informing people that they should only enter if they do not have COVID-19-like [symptoms](#).
 - Actively screen people prior to entry by asking if they have COVID-19, COVID-like symptoms, have travelled outside of Ontario in the past 14 days, or have had close contact with a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19. Only permit entry to those who answer 'No' to all questions. Encourage those who answer 'Yes' to one or more questions to go to home, and contact their local health care provider or book an appointment at a local [Assessment Centre](#) for testing.
 - Recommend that people complete Ontario's [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) prior to arriving.
- Maintain a log of staff, volunteers, congregants and members of the public that enter the building, to assist with contact tracing if needed.

Keep Hands and Surfaces Clean

- [Post signage](#) to encourage people to wash hands upon entry and exit of the building for at least 15 seconds with soap and water or alcohol based (60-90% alcohol) hand rub. Washing with soap and water is preferred, if hands are visibly dirty.
- Ensure washrooms supplies are maintained, including hot and cold water, soap in dispensers, paper towels and toilet paper.
- Use paper towel dispensers instead of hand dryers where hands-free taps are not available in order to prevent recontamination of hands when turning off taps.
- Provide adequate hand hygiene supplies, including alcohol-based (60-90% alcohol) hand rub stations at entrances and exits. Caution should be taken to limit access to hand sanitizer by young children without supervision.
- Provide tissues and no-touch waste receptacles.
- Encourage people to practice respiratory etiquette: cough or sneeze into the bend of the arm, not hands, or use a tissue followed by an alcohol-based hand rub (60-90% alcohol).
- Conduct frequent [cleaning and disinfection](#) of all high-touch surfaces and common areas including door handles, counters, cabinet doors, pews, elevator buttons, light switches, faucets, toilet handles, hand rails and ceremonial objects.

- Remove non-essential items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected.
- Use only disinfectants that have an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN), which confirms it is approved for use in Canada. Check the expiry dates of products and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensure all water systems (drinking fountains) are safe to use after the prolonged facility shutdown to minimize risk of diseases associated with water (see [Canadian Water and Wastewater Association Fact Sheet: Safely Reopening Buildings](#)). If drinking fountains are available, ensure they are used safely and cleaned and disinfected daily. Discontinue use of holy water stoup.

Maintain Physical Distancing

- Host services without gathering in-person if possible (for example, offer services online or by telephone, closed circuit radio, video conference/recordings or [drive-in services](#)).
- Limit attendance to 30% of the building capacity by offering multiple, small services for segments of the congregation. Require that attendants register or sign up in advance to attend the service, by e-mail or telephone.
- Encourage people to access the place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services.
- Avoid any activities that require people to congregate (for example, child minding, discussion groups, communal meals and study groups).
- Ensure physical distancing of two metres (six feet) can be maintained by:
 - Controlling or staggering entry and exit of the building.
 - Creating visual cues if needed, such as spacing out seating (members of the same household may sit close together).
 - Using signage, floor markings, and implementing unidirectional flow of traffic.
 - Encouraging the use of non-medical masks when physical distancing is a challenge. For different medical reasons, not everyone can wear non-medical masks.

Reduce Sharing and Physical Contact

- Avoid serving food and beverages wherever possible. If food or drink must be served, do so using pre-packaged or individual portions served by a small number of designated individuals taking care to limit close contact.
- Avoid rituals involving close physical contact (for example, baptism, circumcision, and communion) or shared items (for example, drinking from a chalice and passing a candle). If these rituals must be performed, use appropriate personal protective equipment and disinfect shared items between uses.
- Encourage people to greet each other with a smile, bow, or wave instead of a handshake or hug.
- Consider providing a designed area to offer donations, using online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines instead of passing around offering collection.

- Encourage people to bring their own items (for example, books, hymns, prayers mats, pipes and programs) or print single-use items to avoid handing out or sharing items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected.
- Avoid touching statues and other religious symbols. If touched, ensure people wash their hands afterwards.

Keep Music Safe

- Avoid congregational singing, choirs and the use of wind instruments in an effort to limit the projection and spread of respiratory droplets.
- Soloists or small groups may perform if completely separated from the audience and each other (for example, Plexiglas barrier or wearing non-medical masks).
- Consider using re-recorded music.

Manage Individuals Who Develop Symptoms Onsite

- If a person develops a [symptom associated with COVID-19](#) while onsite, separate them from others immediately and ask them to put on a face covering.
 - Ask the individual and their close contacts to go home, contact their health care provider or book an appointment at a local [assessment centre](#) and self-isolate for 14 days.
 - If the individual is seriously ill and in need of medical attention, call 911 and describe symptoms accurately to ensure correct precautions are taken.
- Once the individual has left, thoroughly clean and disinfect the areas visited or touched by the individual or their close contact.

Additional Resources

- [Safety guidelines and posters](#) released by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.
- [Guidance documents](#) from health and safety associations.
- Additional guidelines provided by coordinating bodies specific to your faith-based organization.