

COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines: Places of Worship

Updated January 15, 2021

This document provides local public health guidance to places of worship and faith communities in Halton. This document does not replace guidance from the Province, including [O. Reg. 11/21](#) and [O. Reg. 82/20](#). For specific questions about COVID-19 provincial regulations, please contact the **Stop the Spread Business Information Line** at 1-888-444-3659.

COVID-19 transmission

COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person through the respiratory droplets of someone with COVID-19. The respiratory droplets can travel up to two metres (six feet) through coughs, sneezes or talking. COVID-19 can also be transmitted when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes.

State of Emergency and Stay-At-Home Order

On [January 12](#), 2021, the Ontario government declared a State of Emergency and issued a stay-at-home order under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA), [O. Reg. 11/21: Stay-At-Home Order](#), which came into effect January 14, 2021.

Places of worship must also continue to abide by the public health measures outlined in [O. Reg. 82/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 1](#) including:

- Weddings, funerals and other religious services, rites or ceremonies held in staffed facilities and private dwellings:
 - 10 people indoors and 10 people outdoors where physical distancing can be maintained.
- Virtual and drive-in services, rites or ceremonies are permitted.
- No social gatherings are permitted to be held indoors (including those associated with weddings, funerals and other religious services, rites or ceremonies) and maximum of 5 people outdoors.
- Non-medical masks or face coverings are required by all staff and guests.
- All staff must complete the [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Workplaces](#) before entering.
- A [safety plan](#) must be developed and made available.
- Ensure equipment and washrooms are cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Additional COVID-19 Public Health Measures

The following COVID-19 Public Health Measures are also recommended by Halton Region Public Health.

Screen for COVID-19 Symptoms

For employees:

- Use the provincial [screening tool for workplaces](#) to actively screen staff before each shift. If a staff member screens positive and/or if they develop [symptoms](#), direct them to:

- return or stay home;
- contact their health care provider or book an appointment at a local [Assessment Centre](#) for testing; and
- [self-isolate](#) at home.

For congregants and members of the public:

- Recommend that people complete Ontario's [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) prior to arriving.
- Display [posters](#) on the entry door and throughout the facility to prompt anyone to self-identify if they feel unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, or have been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Screen all individuals, including children, for COVID-19 symptoms upon entry to the facility.
 - [Actively screen](#) people prior to entry by asking if they have COVID-19, [COVID symptoms](#), have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days (unless [exempt](#)), or have had close contact with a person who has or may have 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.
- Keep a record of all individuals (including names, contact information, dates and times) who attend services or enter the facility (for example, staff, volunteers, congregants and members of the public). These records should be kept confidential and could support case and contact tracing by the local public health unit in the event of an outbreak.

Maximize Physical Distance

- Ensure a minimum physical distance of two metres (six feet) can be maintained between all individuals that are not in the same household by:
 - Controlling or staggering the flow of individuals to prevent crowding, especially at entrances, exits, hallways and restrooms.
 - 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.
- Consider hosting 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](#)).
- 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.
- Consider creating cohorts for individuals and families where possible (for example, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different groups).
- Adapt or suspend regular childcare and children's programming. Any childcare and children's programming should operate in a manner generally consistent with the [Ministry of Health's COVID Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
- Suspend social gatherings before or after in-person services, including those where food and drink are shared.

Reduce Physical Contact

- Suspend the serving of food and beverages.

- Avoid rituals involving close physical contact (for example, baptism, communion or any similar activity) 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.
- Remind people to greet each other with a smile, bow, or wave instead of a handshake or hug.
- Provide a designed area to offer donations, using online/e-transfer or debit/credit card tap machines instead of passing around offering collection.
- Adapt or suspend the sharing or distribution of materials or objects, which may include but is not limited to: books, communion, microphones, prayer mats, prayer shawls and water. If any materials or objects are shared or distributed:
 - Ensure that hand hygiene is performed prior to distribution or sharing.
 - Leave objects or materials to be distributed on a table for individuals to pick up.
 - Limit the number of individuals who have contact with materials or objects. Ensure any materials or objects that are returned or accessed within the setting are disinfected.
 - See [COVID-19 Guidance for Handling Materials](#).

Wear a non-medical masks

- [Consolidated By-law 47-20](#) and [O. Reg. 82/20](#) requires individuals to wear a non-medical mask or face covering in indoor public spaces.
- Encourage the [proper use](#), removal and disposal of face coverings and non-medical masks.
- Remind congregants, volunteers and staff that non-medical masks do not replace other important public health measures, such as physical distancing, washing hands frequently, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or sleeve and staying home when ill.

Keep Hands and Surfaces Clean

- [Post signage](#) to encourage people to perform hand hygiene upon entry and exit of the building for at least 15 seconds with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub (60-90% alcohol). 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 when hands-free taps are not available, in order to prevent the recontamination of hands when turning off taps.
- Provide alcohol-based (60-90% alcohol) hand rub stations at the entrances and throughout the facility. Caution should be taken to limit access to hand sanitizer by young children without supervision.
- Provide tissues and no-touch waste receptacles.
- Remind people to practice respiratory etiquette: cough or sneeze into the bend of the arm, not hands, or use a tissue and to avoid touching their face, followed by an alcohol-based hand rub (60-90% alcohol).
- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day (when in use) or following every religious service, whichever is more frequent. Surfaces most likely to become contaminated include doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons, water fountain/cooler knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, ceremonial objects, electronic devices, and tabletops.
- 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, follow the manufacturer's instructions and ensure that the product is compatible with the item to be cleaned and disinfected.

- 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.

Keep Music Safe

- Adapt or suspend singing, choirs, and the playing of wind or brass instruments.
 - Consider audio or video recordings instead of live singing or wind or brass instrumental music.
 - Avoid group or congregational singing.
 - Anyone singing or play wind or brass instruments should be separated from others by an impermeable barrier and should maintain two metres (six feet) distance from others.

Manage Individuals Who Develop Symptoms Onsite

- If a person develops a [symptom associated with COVID-19](#) while onsite, separate them from others immediately.
 - Ask the individual and their close contacts to go home, self-isolate and contact their health care provider or book an appointment at a local [assessment centre](#).
 - 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 contacts.

Additional resources

- Halton Region Public Health:
 - [Cleaning practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#)
 - [COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines: Public Washrooms](#)
- Government of Ontario:
 - [COVID-19 Advice: Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)
 - [Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#)
 - [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19](#)
 - [Ontario Regulation 82/20](#): Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 (Rules for Areas in Stage 1).
 - [Ontario Regulation 11/21](#): Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (Stay-At-Home Order).

More information

For more information and updates, visit: halton.ca/COVID19 or call 311.