

# COVID-19 Guidance for Faith Based Gatherings

## February 11, 2021

Faith-based activities, rituals and practices should be reviewed to determine if they increase the risk of spreading COVID-19, with a focus on those that increase the risk of COVID-19 through contact (touching surfaces) or droplet transmission (sneezing, coughing, singing). Consider discontinuing or altering practices or activities that increase risk.

This document provides additional guidance for faith-based gatherings. This guidance must be used in conjunction with the [COVID-19 Prevention Guide for event organizers, theatres and performance venues](#), [COVID-19 Guidance for Musicians \(Vocalists and Instrumentalists\)](#) and all individuals must adhere to the public health measures outlined in the Health Protection Act [Order](#).

The most effective measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 includes separating people by maintaining physical distance (2 metres/6 feet) or the use of physical barriers where physical distance is difficult to maintain. Using a layered approach with multiple measures including environmental cleaning, the use of non-medical masks, conducting frequent hand hygiene and maintaining respiratory etiquette decreases the number of interactions and increases the safety of interactions that occur.

- Consider alternate options for an in-person gathering such as a virtual, outdoor or drive-in event.
- Individuals should not attend faith-based gatherings while ill, even if symptoms are mild. The [COVID-19 Daily Checklist](#) should be completed
- Maintain physical distancing between all individuals including congregants, ushers, greeters, officiant, etc. [people from the same household or pre-determined close social group do not have to keep physical distance].
- Adjust seating arrangements to allow physical distancing.
- Non-medical masks must be worn in all public indoor spaces.
- Discourage in-person attendance for people at higher risk of experiencing severe illness (age; underlying health conditions).
- Traditional greetings such as handshakes and hugs should be avoided.

- Ceremonial traditions that involve sharing of items or close contact should be altered to maintain a 2 metre/6 foot separation. Avoid passing objects (e.g. offering baskets, collection plates, pipes, talking sticks, etc.); use alternative methods such as on-line collection, collection boxes, , use of individual talking sticks.
- Instructional settings for children (e.g. Sunday school) should follow the applicable guidelines for day camps at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Return-to-Day-Camp-Guidelines.pdf>
- Small group, instructional settings for adults (e.g., bible study) must follow social distancing and gathering size requirements.
- Singing and playing wind or brass instruments are higher risk activities because the virus can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets. If you choose to allow these activities, refer to the [COVID-19 Guidance for Musicians \(Vocalists and Instrumentalists\)](#) for ways to minimize risk. Any singing should be done by identified choirs or groups, congregational singing and chanting should be limited or not allowed at this time. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music.
- Providing food and beverages before and after faith-based activities or events can occur if physical distancing and good hand hygiene practices are followed. Self-serve areas are discouraged. Designated individuals to serve food and beverages is recommended while maintaining physical distancing and wearing non-medical masks. Food and beverages should not be shared.
- Avoid offering shared receptacles for liquid (e.g. holy water fonts, chalice, etc.).
- Provide hand sanitizer at the entry and throughout the facility.
- Shared objects (e.g. ceremonial objects, books, hymns, prayer mats, etc.) should be [cleaned and disinfected](#) after each use.
- Remove items from use that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- If touching of ceremonial objects is required for religious/spiritual reasons, then individuals must perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object and object cleaned and disinfected between uses.