



The United Church of Canada L'Eglise Unie du Canada



First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council
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Covid-19 Update (March 18, 2021)

Dear Members of First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council,

It has been just four weeks since we all had to all shut down due to the COVID-19 second wave. It was a stark reminder of how quickly things can change. Now that the curve is flattening, I want to take this time to thank all of you for your willingness to follow the Health Directive, which of course is law, but more than that, to thank you for being respectful of the guidelines of the Region. When you look at how quickly we have been able to flatten this curve, it has been in no small part due to your commitment to love deeply and serve humbly. Thank you.

We have been getting some questions for clarification for our congregations, based on the new alert levels we are currently in. As we know, our alert levels, while they may have the same number as in the previous wave, have had changes as they open up to us. It is important that our opening is slow. It is also important that we do not become complacent so that we are able to prevent a third wave.

Please make sure, as before, you have your re-entry plan written, posted and well defined, and that your plan follows all of the guidelines set by the health authorities and the Region.

ALERT LEVEL 4 (Avalon Peninsula) Public Spaces and Gatherings:

- Gatherings at funerals, burials, weddings, and religious and cultural ceremonies are limited to no more than 10 people, including the officiant. Physical distancing must be maintained.
- Public visitations and wakes are prohibited.
- Informal gatherings are limited to only those in your bubble.

In Alert Level 4, places of worship may host services and faith-based activities of no more than 10 people. This limit includes officiants, staff and volunteers. This means we are permitted to re-enter our churches with a maximum of ten people. This means only ten people in the building at one time.

ALERT LEVEL 3 (All Regions Except the Avalon) Public Spaces and Gatherings:

- Gatherings at funerals, burials, weddings, and religious and cultural ceremonies are limited to no more than 20 people, including the officiant. Physical distancing must be maintained
- Public visitations are permitted, with one household bubble visiting at a time. Wakes are prohibited.
- Informal gatherings are limited to only those in your Tight 10.

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In Alert Level 3, places of worship may host services and faith-based activities of no more than 20 people. This limit includes officiants, staff and volunteers. This means we are permitted to re-enter our churches with a maximum of twenty people. This means only twenty people in the building at one time.

Guidance for All Alert Levels

To best prevent the spread of COVID-19, places of worship are encouraged to continue hosting services and faith-based activities online or through [drive-in services](#). Social gatherings that normally occur before and after a service (e.g. communal dinners and lunches) should be avoided at this time.

Masks are required while inside places of worship, including when seated, in accordance with the [Special Measures Order](#).

Know the Risks

Faith-based services pose a risk of COVID-19 transmission through:

- Gatherings;
- Sharing of ceremonial objects, communion; and
- Singing.

We also know that individuals over 60 and those with chronic conditions are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee at the place of worship tests positive for COVID-19, Public Health requests organizers to ask individuals to voluntarily provide their name and contact information when attending faith-based activities and events in person. Faith-based organizations will have full ownership of their attendance lists, and will only be asked to share attendance lists with Public Health if a potential exposure occurs. Lists can be discarded after 30 days.

Promote Physical Distancing

- Physical distancing of two metres (6 feet) must be maintained between participants. People from the same household bubble can sit together without physical distancing.
- Use visual cues to support physical distancing, such as floor markings and [posters](#). Verbal reminders of physical distancing are also recommended.
- If multiple gatherings are held on a single day, the start and end times must allow for attendees who are exiting one gathering to avoid contact with those arriving for the next gathering. There must also be sufficient time for cleaning and disinfection between gatherings.
- For more guidance, please see [Physical Distancing for Businesses](#).

Enhanced Sanitation

- For guidance on cleaning, see: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/Covid-19/files/factsheet-Covid-19-environmental-cleaning-NL.pdf>

- Provide Health Canada approved hand sanitizer (these typically contain at least 60 per cent alcohol) near the entrances and exits and throughout the place of worship in high traffic areas. Signage should be posted asking congregants to use sanitizer.
- Increase cleaning and disinfection of commonly contacted areas, including:
 - Seating;
 - Doorknobs;
 - Railings;
 - Light switches;
 - Elevator buttons; and
 - Ceremonial objects
- Washrooms should be open, but increased cleaning and disinfection must take place. Ensure washrooms are always supplied with liquid soap and paper towels, and that warm running water is available. Contactless garbage bins should be available and emptied frequently.

Higher Risk Activities

- Handshaking, hugging, touching or passing objects between people, or other forms of physical contact are not permitted.
- Passing collection plates is not permitted. Alternatives can be considered, such as online donations or a depository to accept offerings.
- Faith-based rituals requiring physical contact between people should be changed to maintain physical distancing. People participating in such rituals are required to wear a non-medical mask, unless they are exempt for any reason.
- Common use items such as books and hymnals may be used if set aside for at least 24 hours between uses. However, projecting materials or distribution of single-use materials should be considered, and congregants be encouraged to bring their own items. Discard printed materials after the service is complete.
- If touching of ceremonial objects is required, individuals should perform hand hygiene before and after touching the object. They should not kiss, embrace, or press their faces on any shared ceremonial objects.
- Handheld microphones should not be shared, unless they are disinfected between uses. Limit the number of people providing readings or other activities that need a microphone.
- If sharing communion is part of a faith-based ritual, the following precautions must be taken:
 - Serve in pre-packaged or individual portions
 - Have a small number of designated servers
 - Servers and recipients must not have physical contact
 - Servers are required to wear a non-medical mask, and wash or sanitize their hands immediately before and after serving. Recipients are also recommended to wash or sanitize their hands before and after consuming.
- Congregational Singing and Choirs are not recommended. You may have a soloist or a small group lead the singing for you with at least 2 meters between singers and the congregation. Encourage congregants to hum softly to the hymns rather than singing.

For guidance on singing and playing wind/brass instruments, please see <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/information-sheets-for-businesses-and-workplaces/group-singing-and-wind-instrument-playing/> (see section, singing in faith-based communities)

- Children's programs are not recommended at this time, with the exception of After School Programs in accordance with the approved guidelines.

Personal Practices

- You should complete the [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) before visiting a place of worship.
- You should stay home if you are sick.
- If you are over 60, or have an underlying medical condition, you should consider delaying your return to your place of worship. Continue to participate in services online, if possible.
- If you have travelled anywhere outside of Newfoundland and Labrador in the past 14 days, you need to self-isolate and are not permitted to visit the place of worship.
- Wash or sanitize your hands often.
- Practice cough and sneeze etiquette, and avoid touching your face.
- You are required to wear a non-medical mask, including when seated, in accordance with the [Special Measures Order](#).

Take care of yourself and each other, and may God bless you in all the work you do.

Faith

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister

March 18, 2021