

## COVID-19 Guidance for Faith Based Gatherings

July 14, 2020

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, 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. Visit the [811 website](#) for an up to date list of signs/symptoms.
- 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.
- Attendees should wear a non-medical mask, especially when physical distancing may not be able to be maintained (e.g. when entering and exiting the facility)
- 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, “self-serve” communion.
- 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.

# NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

[novascotia.ca/coronavirus](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus)



- Singing and playing wind or brass instruments are higher risk activities because the virus can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets. Choirs are not recommended at this time; refer to the *COVID-19 Guidance for Musicians (Vocalists and Instrumentalists)*.
  - Discourage congregational singing and chanting. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music
  - Consider using pre-prepared audio or video recordings rather than live vocalists or instrumentalists.
  - For Ceremonies where drumming and chanting are core parts of the event, drummers should use their own drums and drumsticks, maintain physical distancing of 2 metres/6 feet, consider facing the same direction. Avoid sharing big drums, consider the use of hand drums.
- Providing food and beverages (including communion) before, during or after faith-based activities or events is discouraged due to the increased risk of close contact involved with offering and accepting these items. Consider alternatives to traditional methods that maintain physical distancing and follow good hand hygiene.
- 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.