



COVID-19 Health Measures and Protocols for Religious Services

September 15, 2021

A. Health Measures

- Masks are **mandatory** in indoor public settings for everyone, excluding children under 5.
- Measures should be implemented to ensure that households (individuals residing at the same residence) are able to maintain at least a 2-metre distance from other households. Individuals that are not from the same household must not sit together, even those who are fully vaccinated.
- All high contact areas must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use. (e.g. pews, doorknobs, bathrooms and other high traffic areas.) An approved list of disinfectants can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Liquid hand sanitizer must be made available at the entrances of church buildings.
- If parishes are not able to ensure sufficient disinfecting, control of allowable number of people and proper distancing in the government prescribed manner, they must not allow gatherings until they are able to do so. This includes gathering for live stream purposes.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms of sickness should remain home.
- A COVID-19 symptom checklist should be posted in a prominent place at or near the church entrance to ensure individuals self-screen upon arrival.

- Contact tracing information should be collected by parishes (e.g. sign in sheet, pre-registration, etc.) and kept by parishes for 4 weeks. The Archdiocese of St. Boniface does not require proof of vaccination for people attending religious services. Should there be a COVID-19 outbreak at a parish, contact tracing would therefore be the most useful tool available to Manitoba Health.
- Parish bulletins and other printed materials may now be made available for the faithful. This underlines the importance of sanitizing your hands when you enter and exit the church.

B. Protocols

1) Capacity

- Indoor faith-based gatherings are now limited to 50 per cent capacity or 150 people, whichever is **greater** and measures must be implemented to ensure that persons attending the service are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from other persons at the service, other than persons who reside at the same private residence.
- A church with an attached hall where the Mass or Religious Service can be transmitted may include that hall's capacity in calculating the overall number of faithful allowed to attend the service.

The maximum number allowed during religious services does not include the celebrant as well as other persons assigned by the parish, such as a cantor or lector, or persons responsible for the livestreaming of the event.

- Outdoor faith-based gatherings are now limited to 50% of the capacity or 1500 people, whichever is **lesser**; and measures must be implemented to ensure that persons attending the service are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from other persons at the service, other than persons who reside at the same private residence.

2) Masks

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the medical community (1), backed by ongoing scientific studies, has concluded that masks can slow the spread of the virus by protecting others from the respiratory droplets of people who are infected but don't have any symptoms.

While face shields can provide some protection from COVID-19, they are not better than a mask for reducing exposure to the virus, nor are they equivalent to wearing a mask and should not be used as a substitute. (2)

(1) Canada Public Health, Manitoba Public Health, World Health Organization, among others.

(2) Public Health Ontario, Ottawa Public Health, among others.

- Masks are **mandatory** in indoor public settings. A person who enters or remains in an indoor public place must wear a mask in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin without gapping. It is the responsibility of the parish to ensure that everyone not wearing a mask while in the indoor public setting is given a reminder to do so as soon as possible.

There are exceptions to mask wearing:

- a child who is under five years of age
- a person with a medical condition that is unrelated to COVID-19, including breathing or cognitive difficulties, or a disability, that prevents them from safely wearing a mask
- a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- a person who needs to temporarily remove their mask while in the indoor public place for the purpose of (i) receiving a service that requires the removal of their mask, (ii) consuming food or drink, (iii) an emergency or medical purpose
- Parishes are asked to provide disposable masks free of charge to anyone arriving at a religious service without one, encouraging them to wear it. This should be done in a welcoming, loving, and compassionate manner.
- The presider, deacon, lector, and cantor need not wear a mask when reading, leading prayer, or singing. Masks must be worn at all other times.

3) Singing

Preface

Singing, to a degree much greater than talking, aerosolizes respiratory droplets extraordinarily well. Deep breathing while singing facilitates those respiratory droplets getting deep into the lungs of other choir members. Thus, the situation of choir members standing close to each other and singing with full voice produces a dangerous level of contagion.

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control has concluded that masks stop the spread of droplets from a person's mouth and nose when singing. Public Health Ontario notes that 35.7% of droplets remain suspended in the air after 30 minutes when singing.

- Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others.
- Those attending a Mass are encouraged not to sing. However, they are invited to hum along, lip-sync or speak the lyrics quietly. Parishes can increase participation of the whole congregation by choosing to speak rather than sing parts of the Mass. (e.g. Psalm, Amen, Gloria, etc.)
- Wearing a mask when singing is **mandatory** for the congregation. Why? Wearing a mask when singing decreases the danger of contagion even more.
- Singing by choirs is now permitted by the Province. In a grouped setting, choir members **must** wear a mask while singing. Choirs are asked to position themselves at least 20 feet from the congregation and, if possible, even further.
- Cantors who are singing alone or with another singer need not wear their masks when singing. If they are from the same household, they may sing together at one microphone.

- Hymnals may now be used. This underlines the importance of sanitizing your hands when you enter and exit the church.

4) Communion

So as to be attentive to vulnerable people (people with pre-existing medical conditions, those who are not fully vaccinated), masks **must** be worn by pastors, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Communion while distributing Communion.

- At this time, it is recommended that all people receive Holy Communion only on the hand, in order to reduce the risk of contagion as much as possible (1).
- Communicants who hold to receiving Holy Communion on the tongue should be served at the end of the Communion line, with the minister using hand sanitizer after each communicant.

(1) *"The prudent option is to remain offering The Eucharist on the hand."* – Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians and Societies executive member.

According to the Ad hoc Committee of Catholic Doctors for the US Catholic Medical Association, "Communion should be received in the hand, because newly available evidence shows that viral burden of COVID-19 is highest in oral secretions. (saliva on the tongue)" Please note that the CMA has changed its position as more conclusive scientific evidence was found. In March 2020, it described Communion on the tongue as a low risk activity, but now has raised it to a level of a more dangerous practice.

5) Proof of Vaccination at Mass?

The Archdiocese of St. Boniface will not ask people attending Mass or other religious services (see Section 8 of this document *Nature of Religious Services*) to show proof of vaccination. A church is a place for gathering together for prayer and discernment in shared mercy. Our Church seeks conversion to the love of Jesus, not the control of people's thoughts and actions.

We are therefore invited to walk in faith and to grow in love of each other, striving to keep everyone safe, healthy and well, remembering the most vulnerable beside us in the pews and in society.

Animated by this love we are all invited to respect the letter and spirit of the current provincial health orders, as well as the diocesan COVID-19 protocols.

To view a video by Archbishop LeGatt on this question, [click here](#).

NOTE: receptions, banquets, fall suppers and similar events where food is served may require proof of immunization. See Section 10 of this document - Receptions, Falls Suppers and Banquets for further details.

6) Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms

- Indoors, weddings, funerals, prayer vigils for the deceased and baptisms are limited to 50 persons or 50 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is **greater**. Please ensure that persons attending the service are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from other persons at the service, other than persons who reside at the same private residence.
- **Outdoor faith-based gatherings.** Please note that the maximum number of people gathered at a grave or columbarium is 500 persons.

The celebrant, as well as other persons assigned by the parish, such as a cantor or lector, or persons responsible for the livestreaming of the event, are NOT to be counted among the persons attending indoors. In the case of funerals, staff from a funeral home are NOT to be counted. A photographer or videographer is also NOT to be counted among the persons attending indoors, or the 500 persons attending outdoors.

- **Receptions.** Receptions following a wedding, funeral or baptism are permitted. Such gatherings may take place if the number of persons does not exceed 50 persons or 50 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is greater.
- If food is served, proof of vaccination will be required if the reception is held in a facility (i.e. church hall) with a permit allowing them to serve food. In such a case, the facility is bound by the same restrictions as restaurants and licensed premises of the current Public Health Orders (see Order 7).

7) Livestreaming / Broadcasting of Religious Services

- The livestreaming of Masses, weddings, funerals, etc. is permitted.
- The doubling up of responsibilities (cantor, musician, lector, altar server, etc.) is highly recommended.
- Persons responsible for livestreaming, as well as the liturgical team (presider, deacon, lector, altar server, cantor, and musician), are NOT to be counted among the people allowed to attend.

When livestreaming a Mass, please keep in mind that it is *essential* that the current public health measures are maintained.

8) Nature of Religious Services

What is considered a Religious Service?

The following are to be considered “religious services” and must follow the same health measures and protocols as a Mass:

- Mass
- Prayer Services, such as Adoration, Way of the Cross, Recitation of the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, regularly scheduled Youth Group Meetings and Retreat type events.
- All celebrations of the Sacraments, i.e. baptisms, reconciliation, confirmation, and weddings.
- Sacramental preparation sessions
- RCIA formation meetings
- Bible study, Lectio Divina, and Faith Formation activities
- Catechism classes
- Catholic Women’s League Meetings
- Knights of Columbus Meetings
- Couples for Christ meetings
- Legion of Mary meetings
- Parish Pastoral Council Meetings

What is NOT considered a Religious Service?

- Meetings organized for any other purpose where worship and faith development are not the main goal, such as administrative meetings, funeral, wedding and baptismal receptions, are not considered religious services or faith-based gatherings, but are considered indoor gatherings. As such, they may take place if the number of persons does not exceed 50 persons or 50 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is greater.

9) Catechism Classes

Catechism classes are religious services and should be organized according to Order 20 – Places of Worship - of the current Public Health Orders. Masks should be worn at all times (except for children under age five and the other exceptions in the public health order). Physical distancing of 2 metres between households applies as in all religious services. Parishes are encouraged to explore other formats, such as online options, limiting class sizes, small cohorts, additional sessions to catechize and still respect the spirit of the order.

- Some classrooms are not able to accommodate the full 2 metre distance between students at all times. Catechists are asked to take reasonable actions to distance students as much as possible from others.
- Children and family members from shared households with shared parental custody may sit next to each other.
- Catechists, parents, and volunteers are not required to be immunized.
- However, if catechism classes are held in a school during regular school hours, they fall under the Public Health Orders for schools. In that case, teachers, volunteers, and participating parents must be immunized.

10) Receptions, Fall Suppers, and Banquets, etc.

- Funeral, wedding and baptismal receptions, fall suppers or other type of banquet or reception event where food is served in a facility **with a health permit** (e.g. a church or church hall **with a permit** allowing them to serve food) is bound by the restaurant restrictions in Order 7 of the current Public Health Orders. Only persons providing proof of immunization are permitted to attend. Children 12 years or younger do not need to give proof or immunization.
- Public Health Officer Dr. Brent Roussin points out that those attending these celebrations often converge from different locations across the province, and even from outside Manitoba. Moreover, given the strong emotions that accompany these celebrations, it is difficult to discourage hugs, kisses on the cheeks and handshakes, which all increase the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Hence the proof of immunization requirement.
- Parishes wanting to obtain information about the Manitoba Immunization Verifier Application, how to download and use it, can do so by [clicking here](#).
- Banquets and receptions in facilities **that are not licensed or do not have a permit**, where persons attending bring their own food (e.g., potlucks, family dinners, fall suppers that aren't professionally catered), are considered indoor gatherings, and unvaccinated people may attend, but they are limited to 50 people or 50% of the venue capacity, whichever is **greater**.
- Banquets and receptions held at a restaurant or licensed premises are bound by the orders governing those facilities and only persons providing proof of immunization are permitted to attend.
- Coffee, tea, and doughnuts served during a Religious Service such as a Bible study etc. (see Section 8 *Nature of Religious Services*) are acceptable and do not require proof of immunization.

- Meetings such as training sessions for employees, catechists, etc. fall under the category of an indoor meeting. As such, they may take place if the number of persons does not exceed 50 persons or 50 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is greater. Beverages and light snacks can be served. Individually packaged foods are encouraged. Alternately, participants can bring their own snacks and meals.

11) Parish Offices

- Parish offices may resume their regular hours. Masks are **mandatory**. Two-meter social distancing and sanitizing protocols should be maintained.
- Visiting a parish office is permitted. We ask that any communication with your parish office that can be done via phone, email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. take precedence over a visit in person. Should an actual visit need to take place, social distancing and other sanitary measures should be respected.
- Whenever possible, staff and other personnel are encouraged to resume working at their places of work, instead of remotely from home.

C) Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders

- To read the Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders in effect on September 3, 2021, [click here](#).