

# Guidelines updated **as of December 16th** for BC Synod Congregations

Opening places of worship when the time is right

COVID-19 Restrictions for Faith-Based Organizations

**All religious in-person gatherings and worship services are SUSPENDED**

This Public Health Order applies to ALL regions in British Columbia

**in effect as of November 19, 2020 until ~~December 7, 2020~~. As of December 6 this order is extended through until midnight January 8, 2021**

*As you are aware there has been a significant and exponential increase in COVID-19 cases throughout the province of BC. In an attempt to interrupt this escalation, Dr. Bonnie Henry has instituted specific health orders for the entire province **until midnight January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021**. Please follow the links below to read the original documents on the government websites.*

BCCDC: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/community-settings/faith-based-organizations>

BC Government: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/restrictions>

**From the Public Health order of November 19 to January 8, 2021.**

**Religious in-person gatherings and worship services are suspended**

- People should **not** attend church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara and temple services
- Religious services can continue using remote or virtual attendance options, like Zoom or Skype

**OK** Visits to a religious place as an individual or with immediate household are allowed

- This means people can visit religious places as an individual or with their immediate household, but they must take precautions by
  - Staying home if they are sick
  - Wearing a mask in indoor common areas
  - Physical distancing
  - Hand-washing
  - All faith-based organizations must develop a COVID-19 safety plan in accordance with the protocols set out by WorkSafeBC

**X** All indoor and outdoor gatherings as defined in the Gatherings and Events order are suspended

**However, funerals, weddings and baptisms** may proceed with a **limited number of people** and a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place.

- You can have a maximum of 10 people attend, including the officiant
- Because these services are considered “events” under the Gatherings and Events order, organizers must also
  - Collect the first and last names and email addresses or phone numbers of all in attendance, and retain this information for 30 days, in case there is an exposure event, to facilitate contact tracing
  - If renting or using a space that is not owned by the organizer, provide this information to the owner who must retain this information for 30 days

**X** Receptions associated with funeral, wedding or baptism receptions are **not allowed at any location**. That includes:

- Inside or outside homes
- Any public or community-based venues

**OK** Meal preparation as part of a religious service (like at a Gurdwara) with a COVID-19 safety plan in place

- Religious services that include meal preparation like that of a gurdwara or a temple may still continue, but people cannot gather to consume those meals
- There must be a COVID-19 safety plan in place, which includes packaging those meals individually

**OK** Group support meetings (like AA)

- Group support meetings like that of Alcoholics Anonymous are not considered “events” and are considered “essential” so they may continue in faith buildings with the appropriate safety measures in place

**Always consult the most current BC Provincial, Work Safe BC, and Federal websites for the most current information and health regulations.**

Task	Person/Group responsible	Supplies required/notes	Task Complete (Name, Date)	Further action
<b>Be Informed</b>	Who else needs to know this information? Who else needs to be a part of this conversation?			
<p><b>Initial comments</b></p> <p><b>Know the risk factors for the COVID-19 virus and assess your congregation, leadership and context.</b> This can help you make wise decisions about when to consider opening the building for in-person ministry. Risk factors for attendees/leaders include age (65+ at higher risk of serious complications), prevalence of pre-existing health conditions, those in close contact with immune-compromised people. Encourage each person/group to <b>assess these risk factors for themselves</b> to determine whether it is appropriate for them to be involved with in-person activities at this time. <b>This is a personal decision that must be made by each worshipper/participant.</b> It is important for individuals and families to take responsibility for protecting themselves and others.</p> <p>There are different risk factors in urban or rural settings, larger or smaller congregations. In addition, the proximity of health care and testing, current transmission risk in your geographic region, the availability of personal protective equipment and other essential supplies should also inform your decision.</p>				
<p>In addition, you must assess the willingness of people in your congregation to adhere to physical distancing guidelines. Will the congregation/user/rental groups commit to and follow through with cleaning and disinfection protocols? Cleaners should not be those at higher risk (65+, etc.) This assessment will help you decide if you will open the building and return to in-person worship sooner or later.</p>				

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<p>Encourage all congregational members, staff, volunteers, visitors, user and rental groups to use the COVID-19 Self Assessment Tool for BC at <a href="https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en">https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en</a> before entering the building or participating in gatherings. Pass along the message, <b>“If you have any doubts whether or not you should be attending, please stay home.”</b></p>				
<p>Risk factors for attendees/leaders include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those age 65 and older are at a significantly higher risk of serious complications should they contract COVID-19. The % of risk increases in proportion to age.</li> <li>- Those with underlying or compromised medical conditions.</li> <li>- Households where someone is undergoing treatment for cancer or compromised medically.</li> </ul> <p>You <b>must</b> stay home if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You have COVID-19 or live with someone with COVID-19.</li> <li>- You have had symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 10 days. (fever, chills, new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, and new muscle aches or headache.)</li> <li>- You have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or directed to self-isolate.</li> <li>- You are sick, even if you have the slightest symptoms or feelings of sickness, especially if these include upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.</li> <li>- You have recently travelled outside of Canada. (self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms)</li> </ul>				
<p>Many of the congregation’s most committed volunteers are particularly susceptible to the COVID-19 virus because of their age and other pre-existing health conditions. It is recommended that no one 65 + or in a high risk category would serve in an area that puts them at a potentially higher risk of contracting the virus. (e.g. no cleaning of high touch surfaces, no role where physical distancing may be compromised)</p>				

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<p><b>Continue to assess your capacity</b> for worship online or via print communication. Can your leadership comfortably move to accommodate both in-person and online worship? The learning curve over the last few months has been incredible steep. It may be wise to wait to ensure congregational leaders are not overwhelmed by their workload. It is very important to continue to provide online/print resources for those who will not be able to return to in-person worship due to risk factors.</p>				
<p><b>Take time to reflect.</b> What are you discovering about your congregation's ministry during COVID-19? Are there opportunities for new ministry? How well have you learned the technology? What else might God be nudging you to try? Will opening the building for in-person gathering in the near future help or hinder these kinds of initiatives?</p>				
<p><b>Calculate the maximum capacity</b> of your building based on current distancing regulations from the provincial government. This number is either 50 or the calculated seating with a 2 metres physical distancing in all directions, <b>whichever is less</b>. In large buildings that have multiple spaces, as long as groups do not mix, a gathering less than 50 people in one space and a gathering less than 50 people in a separate space does not contravene the mass gathering order.</p>		<p><b>Calculate your max capacity for each space.</b>            Calculated capacity _____.            Government capacity 50.</p>		
<p><b>Review your insurance policy</b> to ensure that proceeding with in-person gatherings does not introduce a potential liability. Congregations use a variety of insurers so do not rely on anyone else for this information. Only your insurer can tell you what coverage you have for your congregation as well as for others using the building as community or rental groups.</p>				
<p>Carefully assess the energy and effort required to ensure proper physical distancing and adherence to health authority and safety regulations. If these are too difficult or impractical it may be best for you to not re-open your building at this time.</p>				

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Determine whether your usual worship space is the best place for worship at this time. Perhaps your fellowship hall may be larger or more easily configured to physical distancing than the primary worship area.				
Consider the possibility of holding a few small outdoor gatherings (maximum 50) for fellowship, prayer or worship using the church parking lot or green space. Keep the gatherings short, ensure adequate physical distancing (2 metres in every direction), invite people to bring their own lawn chairs and remind them to maintain safe distances as they arrive and leave the gathering. BYO (Bring your own beverage and snack.)				
<p><b>It is important to have a plan so that you do not exceed the maximum capacity of your building.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider offering multiple worship services to ensure the number of people will be less than that prescribed by provincial health authorities.</li> <li>- Once your building has reached the calculated capacity no further entry will be permitted.</li> <li>- Don't forget to leave a few spaces for visitors or others who may be new to the congregation.</li> </ul>				
In person social gatherings before or after worship (coffee time, shared meals, etc.) should not take place.				
<b>Prepare the Building</b>				
General cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces should occur at least once a day when the building is being used. Use Health Canada approved chemicals and disinfectants as directed and allow for the proper dry times. (See Appendix 1)				

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Establish a housekeeping schedule that includes frequent cleaning and sanitizing with a particular emphasis on commonly touched surfaces. (e.g. Light switches, Door handles, pews (backs, ends, seats) chairs, tables, cupboard and drawer hardware, phones, washrooms, keyboards, music stands, microphones)				
You are encouraged to have separate entrances and exits along with clear signage to reduce bottle necks where physical distancing would be challenging.				
Place a logbook at the entrance to keep a record of <b>all</b> people entering the building in order to facilitate contact tracing. Helpful columns include: date, time, name, contact number or email address. To facilitate speedier entry to larger gatherings (e.g. worship, bible studies, or other user groups – to the calculated maximum) it may be easiest to create a checklist of attendees. (e.g. church directory, phone list). You need to keep this contact information for a minimum of 30 days.				
If people may be required to wait outside the building prior to entering, clearly indicate the traffic flow, mark the pavement/sidewalk and/or place exterior signage for 2 metres physical distancing.				
Inside the building (use tape to make arrows) to indicate the direction of travel into the worship space. Travel in only one direction down halls and aisles is preferred.				
Mark locations at 2 metres intervals where people may need to line up or wait. (e.g. by the washrooms, near hand sanitizing locations, down the centre aisle in the worship space.)				

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Seating should be arranged or marked (in the case of pews) to ensure proper physical distancing. Block rows of pews/chairs as needed to maintain 2 metre distancing in all directions. Consider using tape to indicate available properly distanced seating options. (Households may be seated together.)				
Post COVID-19 safety information and distancing requirements in highly visible locations inside and outside the building. This shall include at a minimum signage for physical distancing, COVID-19 symptoms, handwashing, and 'Stop, do not enter if you are ill'. (See Appendix 1)				
Post signs and make announcements about the need for non-contact greetings and remind people to refrain from shaking hands and hugging.				
Place Health Canada approved hand sanitizer at the entrance and at various locations throughout the building including the worship space. (See Appendix 1) Be sure to have enough on hand and make provisions for replenishing.				
Provide personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks, as appropriate or required to employees/volunteers for the activity they are performing. If the congregational council decides that masks are required make sure you have these available for guests and others arriving without one. Be sure to have enough on hand and make provisions for replenishing.				
Remove bibles, hymnals, brochures, information cards, pens, pencils, etc. from worship space and common areas.				



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Close spaces/rooms in the building where people do not need to be and consider removing everything nonessential from all spaces to reduce the number of things that need cleaning. Nursery areas and Sunday School areas should remain closed unless constantly supervised with excellent disinfection protocols in place.				
Ensure that the space is set so that worship leaders will have appropriate physical distance from each other.				
Worship leaders should not share microphones.				
If you are using bulletins, have them pre-placed by someone wearing gloves. (As opposed to handing them out as people enter.) Consider placing them at 2 metres intervals to help ensure adequate distancing.				
<p>Washrooms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Congregations must decide how they will manage washrooms. These areas are high use and challenging to maintain. For this reason, some denominations have decided to keep the washrooms closed except for emergency use. If you choose to do this it is important to communicate this to worshippers in advance.</li> </ul> <p>If washrooms are open:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designate and clearly post how many people will be allowed in each washroom at a time.</li> <li>- Place floor indicators in the hallway to show physical distancing for those who are waiting.</li> <li>- Clean and disinfect high touch areas frequently during building use for in-person gatherings.</li> <li>- Ensure a good supply of soap, paper towel, and hand sanitizer.</li> </ul>				

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If applicable, set HVAC systems to introduce fresh air into the worship space and/or block open windows and doors so fresh air can circulate. Leave the doors open during worship and other events to help disperse the aerosol cloud.				
Use projection, if possible, to reduce the need for printed material.				
<b>Communicate Before Opening</b>				
Clearly communicate to congregational members about the changes they can expect when returning to in-person activity in the church building. Describe the changes made to the worship space and common areas to decrease the risk of virus transmission during in-person gatherings. Indicate if there are changes to how worshippers will enter and exit.				
Communicate that staff, volunteers and worshippers who are ill or who are required to isolate due to COVID-19 must stay home.				
Communicate that those with underlying medical conditions and those over 65 years old are at an increased risk of serious illness from the virus.				
Communicate the changes in children's ministry and the space normally used for nursery or Sunday School. Children are to remain with parents/guardians while in the church building.				
Communicate that worshippers must maintain the 2 metres physical distancing at all times except with those in their own household.				

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Communicate the changes in your worship practices to people in advance. (e.g. no congregational singing, how they can safely participate in the spoken portions of the liturgy, advise them as to whether or not you will be celebrating Holy Communion and any changes they can expect, no handshakes or coffee time following worship.)				
<b>Prepare for Worship</b>				
Ensure that the number of worshippers does not exceed the calculated capacity. This may mean offering multiple services and asking people to 'book' themselves into worship. Decide how you will also make sure you have room for visitors or guests to the congregation.				
Determine how you will continue to include in worship those who will not/may not attend in-person worship.				
Train greeters and ushers so they are familiar with traffic flows and revised practices.				
Before worship, place bulletins on the pews/seats to help mark physical distancing. (Wear gloves or have people clean their hands prior to placing them on the seats.)				
Worship leaders should plan and practice their movement in the worship space to ensure physical distancing throughout the service.				
Limit people's movement in worship to minimize the opportunities for contact. This includes during the sharing of the peace. People remain where they were sitting and may bow or open their hands in a gesture of peace to those in other pews/seats around them.				

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Pastors and worship leaders should avoid greeting people as they exit the worship space.				
<p>It is recommended that congregations refrain from congregational singing as it is a higher risk activity with people who are already at higher risk of serious illness from Covid19. This applies to congregational singing as well as choirs.</p> <p>An update as of October 6<sup>th</sup> from the BCCDC.</p> <p><b>Singing and Choirs</b></p> <p>Singing is a very important activity for many faith-based organizations. Although it is a higher risk activity, there are ways to make singing safer. While not as forceful as coughing or sneezing, singing can produce large and small droplets that the virus lives in. While large droplets tend to fall to the ground fairly quickly, smaller droplets can be suspended in the air for up to nine minutes. These small droplets can be inhaled by others into the respiratory system. Having a group of people singing increases the number of these small droplets. In a poorly ventilated room, these droplets can fill a room quickly. The number of singers, the room size, the level of ventilation, and duration of singing all contribute to determining risk of transmission, as well as the transmission within the community.</p>				
<p><b>How to make singing safer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There may be no safe physical distance between singers if someone singing is infected with COVID-19; this is why it is very important for people to remain home if they are ill and to stay away from others;</li> <li>• For people who are well enough to attend services, maintain the two-metre distance between singers and between those who are singing and those who are enjoying the music;</li> <li>• Try singing outdoors wherever possible; indoors, consider the size of the room that the singing is taking place in, and whether or not the ventilation is adequate. Open windows or doors to help ventilate the room. Singing should be avoided in unventilated rooms;</li> <li>• Indoors, limit the number of people who are singing;</li> <li>• Consider breaking into smaller groups that sing together for shorter periods of time;</li> </ul>				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider having one soloist sing for the entire congregation, ensuring at least two metres between the singer and the audience;</li> <li>Encourage humming along to recorded music or along with a soloist or small group of singers; and</li> </ul> <p>Do not share microphones, music stands, or other equipment.</p>				
<b>Task</b>	<b>Person/Group responsible</b>	<b>Supplies required/notes</b>	<b>Task Complete (Name, Date)</b>	<b>Further action</b>
Consider playing live instrumental versions for hymns and inviting worshippers to read along with the words, engage in silent prayer or meditation, or 'sing' along silently.				
Consider having shorter worship services since length of exposure to aerosol particles increases risk.				
Communal responses (speaking in unison) including the creed, the Lord's Prayer, liturgical responses, etc. should be discouraged. Invite worshippers to participate silently or to use movement and gestures . (e.g. The Lord's Prayer in Movement)				
Provide a place where worshippers can deposit physical offerings. Encourage worshippers to make contributions through electronic means.				
Children need to remain with their parents, even if a children's time is offered.				
Ensure people are designated to clean and disinfect the worship space.				

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<p>Holy Communion – Communion may be celebrated but great care must be taken to ensure that physical distancing is maintained and the elements and surfaces are touched as infrequently as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider using wafers rather than fresh bread to minimize handling of the elements.</li> <li>- Communion in one kind is recognized as a full experience of the Sacrament. Consider offering bread only.</li> <li>- Common cup and intinction are not permitted.</li> <li>- To minimize the number of times vessels and elements are handled it is advisable to have all the elements on the table/altar at the beginning of worship.</li> <li>- Pastors and assistants wash and sanitize their hands before blessing the elements and distributing Holy Communion.</li> <li>- Those serving Holy Communion must wear a mask.</li> <li>- Pastors and assistants should not wear gloves when distributing Holy Communion.</li> <li>- Worshippers are directed to servers in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance between family groups.</li> <li>- Communicants sanitize their hands as they proceed to the table.</li> <li>- It is recommended that to minimize close contact, the communicant stands 2 metres away from the pastor to hear the words, “The body of Christ...”. They then step forward to receive the wafer. The pastor/server should take special care to gently drop the wafer into the worshipper’s hand so as not to touch them. Should contact occur the server should pause to sanitize their hands again.</li> <li>- If wine or grape juice is offered, it must be distributed in individual glasses in trays. The communicant stands 2 meters away from the server to hear the words, “The blood of Christ.....” Then they step forward as the server extends the tray. The communicant carefully takes a glass from the tray. Should contact with another glass occur the server shall remove this glass from the tray. (Those preparing communion should ensure that the glasses are spaced widely apart to avoid accidental contact.)</li> </ul>				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide a receptacle into which the communicant can place their glass.</li> <li>- Whether standing or kneeling during communion worshippers must maintain physical distancing. Consider marking the floor/ rail to indicate the appropriate distance.</li> <li>- Ensure worshippers are directed back to their seats in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance between family groups.</li> <li>- Pastors and assistants shall wash and sanitize their hands after distribution.</li> </ul>				
Task	Person/Group responsible	Supplies required/notes	Task Complete (Name, Date)	Further action
<p>Holy Baptism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For now, discourage the practice of worshippers touching the water in the font as they remember their baptism. Instead, invite people to pause a moment in silent prayer.</li> <li>- Sanitize and provide fresh water in the font for each baptism.</li> <li>- Have parents/family hold the child for the baptism.</li> <li>- Water is poured on the baptized with a shell.</li> <li>- The baptized is anointed with oil using a cotton ball.</li> <li>- A member of the baptismal party lights the baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the words of presentation are spoken.</li> </ul>				
<b>Returning to Other In-person Ministries of the Congregation</b>				
<p>Weddings and Funerals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gatherings of up to 50 people physically distancing are permissible.</li> <li>- Weddings and funerals held within the church building must follow the same guidelines as other worship services.</li> </ul>				

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<p>Visitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Care home and hospital visits will follow the protocol of the health authority in your region. Familiarize yourself with the requirements before you visit. Take only essential items into the facility and disinfect carefully before using in another setting.</li> <li>- It is advisable to limit visits to one per day to minimize risk and potential spread.</li> <li>- Visits with church members should take place outdoors or at the church building with proper cleaning and sanitation between visits.</li> <li>- Avoid physical contact and wash hands regularly. Keep hand sanitizer on hand for times when you cannot access soap and water.</li> </ul>				
<p>Renters / User Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outside groups may use the building provided they follow local health regulations regarding physical distancing, etc. Rentals should be suspended if groups cannot or will not adhere to gathering restrictions including maintaining a record of participants by gathering date. Confidential user groups (e.g. AA, OA, NA) are asked to keep their own records and work with provincial health officials if requested for contact tracing.</li> <li>- The facility will need to be cleaned and sanitized before and after all gatherings, paying specific attention to high-touch surfaces.</li> <li>- Unless the rental agreement specifies that the renter must clean and disinfect, then it is the congregation's responsibility to ensure the facility is safe.</li> <li>- Rental groups shall provide written details of how they will observe health guidelines.</li> </ul>				



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<b>General</b>				
The congregation (as employer) must develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan for Work Safe BC. This guideline document will fulfill part of that requirement. Please download the Planning Tool from Work Safe BC. (See Appendix 1)				
Staff and volunteers receive information and training about new processes.				
Staff and volunteers have access to masks and hand sanitizer.				
Offering counters have access to gloves and enough space to maintain physical distancing.				
People are designated to clean and sanitize high traffic areas, including washrooms between services and user groups.				
Leaders remain aware of new Public Health and Work Safe guidelines.				
Leaders are prepared to discontinue in-person worship should that be advised or required by the health authority.				
<b>We strongly recommend each congregation create a COVID-19 leadership team</b> to help lead the congregation through the processes around in-person building use. They will liaise with church council, pastor, staff, committees, and congregational members. Responsibility for creating a safe space must be shared by the whole congregation. There is an awful lot of planning and preparation for this COVID19 Team to work through so it is advised that they begin work well in advance.				