

# Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



## Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations to Prevent COVID-19 Transmission

Updated: July 17, 2020

**If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.**



Ministry of Health



BC Centre for Disease Control



As pillars of strength in communities, faith-based services have an important role in connecting the community by contributing to beneficial and safe social interactions. These services also have a role to play in the prevention of COVID-19 transmission. All faith-based organizations must develop a COVID-19 safety plan in accordance with [protocols](#) set by WorkSafeBC.

A reminder to all: these measures are not forever, but they are very important for now, to protect the health of everyone in the community and in the province. There will be a time when we can all come together again. Until then, participating safely in services and activities is integral to preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting those who are most vulnerable to complications of this disease. Consider those who are at [higher risk](#) of complications from COVID-19 illness – people over the age of 65, with chronic health conditions, medical complexity or immune suppression. Work to support these people to participate in services and activities remotely or virtually. WorkSafeBC has several suggestions for how to conduct services virtually on their [website](#).

### Transmission of COVID-19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus. Common symptoms include dry cough, sore throat, fever, headache, and body aches, though some individuals may have different symptoms, and some may not have any symptoms. The primary mode of transmission is direct and prolonged contact with an infected person and their respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are generated by speaking, breathing, coughing, and sneezing, and they can travel up to 2 metres before settling. Hands and surfaces can become contaminated by droplets, and the virus can also be transmitted when people touch their mouths, noses, or eyes with unwashed hands.

### Basic Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Transmission

It is recommended that faith-based operators increase focus on the following measures:

- Encouraging members to stay home if they are ill;
- Ensuring members have easy access to handwashing stations or hand sanitizing supplies;
- Providing space to allow members to maintain physical distance from those outside of their household or bubble; and
- Practicing routine cleaning and disinfection.

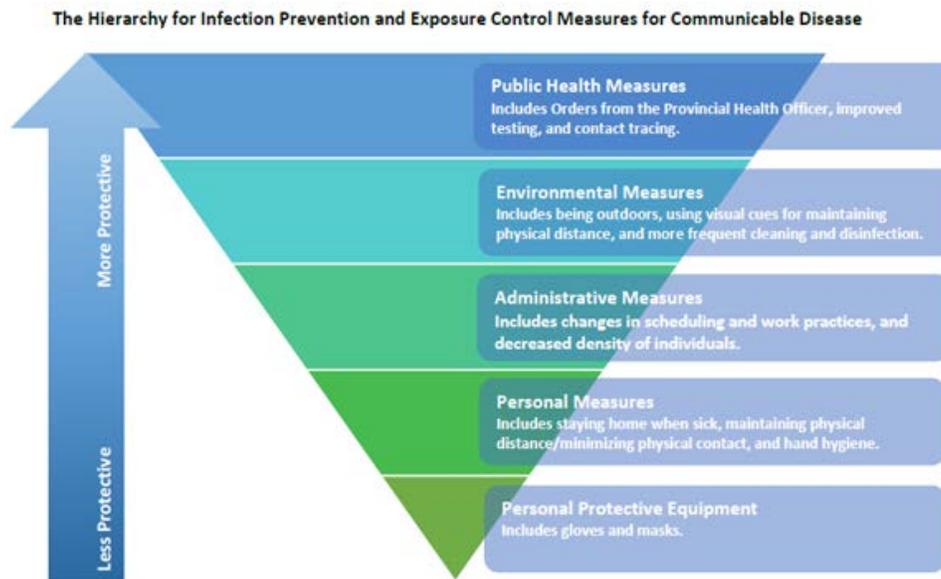
### Members Who Become Ill

It is important that anyone who feels sick stays home and away from others. If a member develops [symptoms of COVID-19](#), ask them to stay away from other people and encourage them to use the Ministry of Health's [online self-assessment tool](#) or call 8-1-1 to determine if they need further assessment for COVID-19 testing by a health-care provider or at a local collection centre..

At this time, only people with cold, influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms or those who are referred to testing by a health-care professional should be tested for COVID-19. Routine asymptomatic testing or temperature checking of members is not recommended in B.C.



## Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Control Measures for Communicable Disease



The hierarchy for infection prevention and control measures for communicable disease such as COVID-19 provides a simplified concept of which measures are most effective, and that no measure is effective entirely on its own. In the figure above, the most effective measures are related to public health measures (testing and contact tracing), followed by environmental measures (physical distancing), administrative measures (reducing the density of a congregation), personal measures (staying home when ill), and finally, personal protective equipment (medical grade devices regulated by Health Canada, and non-medical items such as cloth masks).

### Public Health Measures

#### Mass Gatherings

The Provincial Health Officer's Order on Mass Gatherings prohibits events (e.g., congregations of people) of more than 50 people in one space at one time, recognizing that many spaces will have to have less than 50 people in order to allow for physical distancing. The reason this order is in place is to ensure that public health has the capacity to identify and conduct contact tracing if a case (or cases) of COVID-19 is detected within 14 days of the event. Gatherings of more than 50 people make this critical public health measure to reduce spread difficult. 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.

#### Self-isolation and Quarantine

Travelers who return to BC from outside of Canada are required by Order of the Provincial Health Officer and the federal Quarantine Order to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. Members who have travelled outside of Canada should verify that they have self-isolated in B.C. for a minimum of 14 days without symptoms prior to attending services. Anyone with cold, flu, or COVID-19-like symptoms should self-isolate (see information on BCCDC's website on how to properly [self-isolate](#)), use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#), or call 8-1-1 to see if they need to be assessed by a health care provider to be tested for COVID-19. Self-isolation should occur for at least 10 days after the beginning of symptoms, fever is no longer present, and the individual is feeling better.



## Contact Tracing

It is important to support public health follow up of contacts of positive cases. Anyone who tests positively for COVID-19 will receive follow up from public health; public health will also engage in contact tracing to identify other members who may have come into close contact with a positive case and will advise about self-isolation and conduct testing as needed. To help out, maintain up-to-date contact information for staff and volunteers. Record who is working each day and who attends group activities and events. Record the name and contact information for members who attend services.

## Personal Measures

### Stay Home When Sick

- Operators should have flexible sick-leave policies that support staff to stay home when sick;
- Members should assess themselves daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before attending services;
- Anyone who is sick is not to attend services; and,
- Anybody who has symptoms of COVID-19 should call 8-1-1 and [self-isolate](#).

## Hand Hygiene

Members can pick up and spread germs easily from objects, surfaces, food and people. Rigorous hand washing with liquid plain soap and water is the most effective way to reduce the spread of illness. Ensure hand washing supplies are well stocked at all times including soap, paper towels and where soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand rub with a minimum of 60% alcohol. Place hand washing stations in various locations including entrances to encourage appropriate hand hygiene throughout the stay.

### How to practice diligent hand hygiene:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds regularly. Antibacterial soap is not needed for COVID-19;
- If sinks are not available (e.g., if members are outdoors), use an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60% alcohol; and,
- If hands are visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand rub may not be effective at eliminating respiratory viruses. Soap and water are preferred when hands are visibly dirty.

To learn about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the BCCDC's [hand washing poster](#).

## Respiratory Etiquette

Members should:

- Cough or sneeze into their elbow sleeve or a tissue, throw away used tissues, and immediately wash their hands;
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands; and,
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, or unwashed utensils.

## Administrative Measures

### Physical Distancing

Allowing space for members to move around the premises safely is another measure to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

- Continue the use of virtual or online methods of holding services;



- A safe physical distance of two metres between people from different households should be maintained as much as possible. Where this is not possible, encourage people who can to wear a non-medical mask for the duration of services;
- Encourage members to greet each other with a smile and a wave instead of direct person-to-person contact;
- Small numbers of staff who work together often can relax the distance measures between themselves as long as they are feeling well and can minimize physical contact;
- Where distancing is not reasonable, consider installing physical barriers;
- Children who are not symptomatic can play together but should minimize physical contact; and,
- For information on the use of non-medical masks, please visit the [WorkSafeBC website](#).

### Reducing High Risk Activities

Although important to congregations, there are certain activities that are considered at high risk for COVID-19 transmission.

These activities should be reduced or altered during the course of the pandemic, and other virtual means should be explored to support members to partake in safer ways. It is acknowledged that different faiths have different practices, and faith-based organizations should turn towards their communities for specific guidance.

Examples of activities to reduce or alter include practices that involve person-to-person contact such as hands and faces, shared cups, vessels, or prayer mats. For necessary practices, ensure all sanitary and safety measures are taken; minimize physical contact whenever possible and encourage hand washing or the use of a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol after contact. For donations or offerings, consider designating an area that members can approach to donate or provide offerings, or consider an online method of this collection.

### Singing and Choirs

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.

How to make singing safer:

- 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;
- 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;



- 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;
- Indoors, limit the number of people who are singing and limit the time spent singing – try to aim for less than 30 minutes;
- Consider breaking into smaller groups that sing together for shorter periods of time;
- Consider having one soloist sing for the entire congregation, ensuring at least two metres between the singer and the audience;
- Encourage humming along to recorded music or along with a soloist or small group of singers;
- Support members who wish to wear a face mask or face covering to services and during activities such as singing; and,
- Do not share microphones, music stands, or other equipment.

## Environmental Measures

### Cleaning and Disinfection

Operators should be familiar with cleaning and disinfection practices in accordance with existing requirements regarding general cleanliness and food safety regulations. For additional guidance, please see BCCDC's [Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings](#) guidance.

- Cleaning refers to the removal of visible dirt, grime, and impurities. Cleaning does not kill germs, but helps remove them from the surface.
- Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This is most effective after surfaces are cleaned.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Using a disinfectant that has a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and a viricidal claim. Be sure to follow instructions on the label to disinfect effectively, including precautions to protect staff using these products; and,
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of high-traffic areas and high-use items, such as door knobs, handles, handrails, light switches, washrooms, and counters.

### Food and Beverage Services

Follow the protocols and guidance for routine practices as set out in the *Food Safety Act* and the Food Premises Regulation.

- Consider avoiding communal or buffet-style meals but identify an alternative, such as pre-packaged meals;
- Ensure hand washing stations or hand sanitizer is placed close to where food and drinks are served;
- Designate a person to serve food and drinks to others, and ensure that person washes their hands before serving;
- Ensure physical distancing is maintained;
- Clean condiments between uses if these items are shared; and,
- For additional guidance on food safety, please refer to the [BCCDC website](#).

