

Faith-based organizations: COVID-19 industry-specific information

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on May 27, 2021. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

The following protocols offer guidance for faith-based organizations, including churches, synagogues, and mosques. Depending on the types of services provided, the following protocols may also be of value: office space, child care and day camps, education (K-12), in-person counselling, community social services (residential and non-residential), and restaurants.

Employers must also ensure they are abiding by any orders, notices, or guidance issued by the provincial health officer, and the appropriate health authority, that are relevant to their workplace.

Public health orders: May 27 update

The provincial health officer (PHO) has issued an updated order that allows religious bodies to hold indoor and outdoor worship services, provided certain rules are followed as outlined in the order. Three additional documents provide more information and clarity around these restrictions:

- Variance: Indoor Worship Services – May 26, 2021
- Variance: Outdoor Worship Services – May 26, 2021
- Guidance for Holding Low Risk Worship Services – May 26, 2021

Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace.

The COVID-19 Safety Plan follows the six steps outlined on COVID-19 and returning to safe operation. You can also refer to the COVID-19 Safety Plan OHS Guideline for information about developing a safety plan, including the level of detail required and use of supporting documentation.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the provincial health officer, this plan must be posted at the worksite and on their website, if they have one. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers and to see their plan..

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

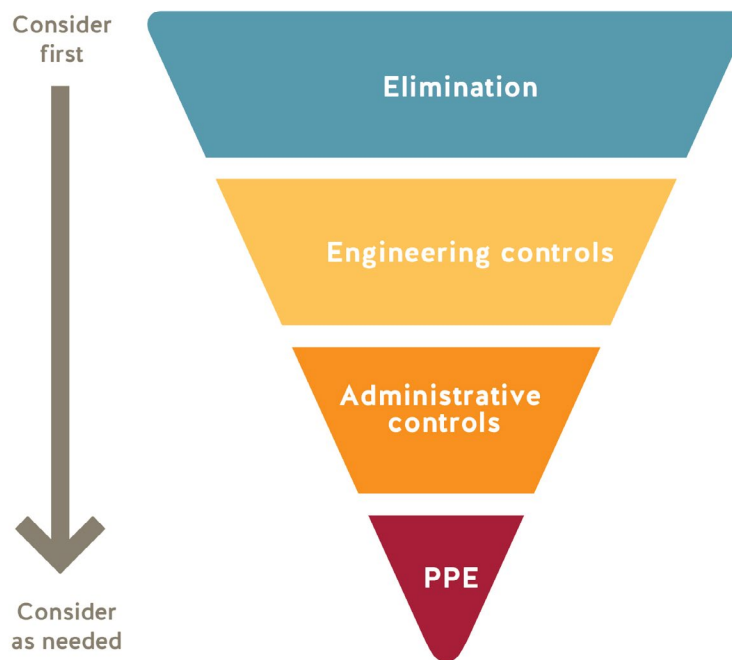
Understanding the risk

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.
- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



First level protection (elimination): Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install barriers such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of masks. Ensure masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that workers are using masks correctly.

Protocols for faith-based organizations

General

- Maintain up-to-date contact information for staff and volunteers.
- Record who is working each day and attending group activities and events.
- Provide information and training to staff and volunteers about appropriate physical distancing, facility-specific risk-reduction measures, and proper respiratory and hygiene practices.

Entry and greeting

- Places of worship are subject to the provincial health officer's order on gatherings and events, which prohibits gatherings of 50 people or more. A maximum of 50 people should be allowed in for a service at any one time and ensure the occupancy limit allows for individuals or households to remain at least 2 metres at any time. In large facilities with more than one area of worship, the 50 patron limit applies to each area within the facility, not to the facility as a whole. Ensure that physical distancing can be maintained in each area of worship, and throughout the facility. Consider measures such as staggering start and end times of services to reduce congestion in common areas.
- Establish and post an occupancy limits for the facility. See the COVID-19 Safety Plan for guidance on establishing occupancy limits. Establish and post occupancy limits for areas within the facility including break rooms and washrooms.
- Establish and post policies restricting access to staff, volunteers, and visitors who are sick, who have travelled from outside of Canada, or who have been advised by public health to self-isolate.
- Identify areas, such as entries/exits or lobbies, where crowding and bottlenecks are common, and use volunteers, staff, or barriers to redirect people who may gather in these areas. Control and stagger entry into, and exit from, the place of worship before and after group activities or events (e.g., by dismissing individuals by household or section, rather than all at once).
- Establish different points of entry and exit from high-traffic areas, where feasible to do so.
- To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee at the place of worship tests positive, organizers can consider asking individuals to provide their name and contact information when attending faith-based activities and events onsite.
- Post signage to inform everyone of the measures in place.
- Provide hand sanitizer at the door for people to use when they enter.
- Ensure greeters remain at least 2 metres from visitors and others or have them stand behind a plexiglass barrier.
- Provide a safe place for visitors to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and other personal protective equipment.
- Remove non-essential communal items, such as pamphlets and magazines.

Prayer or worship

- The gatherings and events order does not apply to "individual attendance at a place of worship for the purpose of prayer or quiet reflection."

- Places of worship are encouraged to continue hosting services and faith-based activities online or through creative mechanisms. Identify ways to support those at high-risk of complications due to COVID-19, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.
- The provincial health officer's gatherings and events order may establish occupancy limits or require the suspension of services and activities including "drive-by," "drive through," or "drive in" services in which individuals participate in faith-based activities and receive services (e.g., blessings) without leaving their cars.
- Reducing attendance can be facilitated by:
 - » Offering multiple, smaller services or events for segments of the congregation instead of single services or events attended by the entire congregation.
 - » Establishing caps on attendance at faith-based activities and events.
 - » Establishing a system for congregants to RSVP to attend specific services or events, to minimize overcrowding.
 - » Encouraging congregants to access the place of worship outside of peak hours if they are attending for purposes other than worship services.
 - » Offering options for remote participation in faith-based activities (e.g., by telephone, closed circuit radio, video conference, video recordings) in conjunction with, or as a replacement for, in-person attendance.
 - » Considering ways other than in-person attendance to include/support people who are at greater risk of severe disease, including people over 65 years of age and people with chronic medical conditions.
 - » The event organizer should ensure that extra precautions are available for these higher risk congregants who do choose to attend in person, such as designating times for individual worship or encouraging mask use for anyone who will be near that person.
- Arrange or mark seating to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household. Depending on the size of seats, this may mean leaving alternating rows empty, and leaving one or more seats empty between parties. This may be done through a combination of blocking off unavailable rows, and signage and communication to patrons reminding them to leave the appropriate number of seats between parties. Block off seats bordering aisles so that people are not required to walk close to others when coming or going.
- Shaking hands, hugging, touching, or passing items between people compromises the 2 metre distance between congregants and should not occur, except between members of the same household or cohort family. Alternatives such as waving, nodding, or bowing should be encouraged.
- Religious rituals that involve physical contact between individuals, such as anointing with oils or baptisms increase the likelihood of disease transmission and should be performed in an alternate fashion that minimizes physical contact if possible.
- Staff a person to direct or install floor decals to facilitate the flow of people during busy times.
- The BCCDC advises that playing instruments or singing lead to increased risk of COVID-19 transmission if proper precautions are not taken. For additional guidance, refer to the BCCDC guidance on choirs and bands.

Donations/offerings

- Avoid passing donation collection plates or containers between congregants. Alternatives include having a designated area to place offerings/donations (touching of offerings/donations collected from patrons should be minimized for the first 24 hours) or online offerings/donations.

Food

- Eliminate self-serve style systems, and replace with attended stations or individually wrapped food.
- Ensure adequate handwashing or sanitizing stations are located close to food.
- Ensure appropriate physical distancing is maintained in food service and eating areas. Consider the configuration of tables and seating to ensure distancing is maintained.
- Establish cleaning procedures for condiments and other items brought to the table or available for sharing. Ensure they are cleaned between uses.
- Physical contact between the designated serving individuals and congregants should not occur while serving food or drink (e.g., placing food in a congregant's mouth). Instead, the server can place the individual food or drink portion in a congregant's outstretched hand, or on a table for the congregant to pick up.
- The designated serving individuals should wash or sanitize hands immediately before serving.

Cleaning and hygiene

- Establish cleaning and disinfecting protocols that address high-contact surfaces throughout the facility, including doors, tables, chairs, break rooms, office spaces, washroom facilities, and pews. Clarify procedures for cleaning staff/volunteer areas and train accordingly.
- Develop a cleaning schedule and assign and train a person who is responsible for completing cleaning tasks and ensuring these tasks are completed. Create a process to track what has been cleaned, when, and by whom.
- Establish handwashing and sanitizing policies, and support these hygiene practices among staff and visitors (e.g., with the presence of hand sanitizer in work areas, lobby spaces, arcades, etc.). Have sanitizer available to congregants, volunteers, and staff. Install additional dispensers as needed. Encourage good respiratory etiquette practices.
- Ensure that religious services are scheduled at appropriate intervals to allow for time to clean, sanitize, and ventilate the space between services.

Related protocols

- Child care and day camps: If you provide child care, during or outside of services, please review the protocols for child care and day camps.
- Classes: If you provide classes to young people, please review the protocols for education (K-12).
- Counselling or confession: If you have practices that are similar to counselling, please review the protocols on in-person counselling.
- Administrative functions: If your organization maintains an office with staff and/or volunteers, please review the protocols on office space.
- Community and social services: If you provide community and/or social services, please review the protocols on community social services (residential and non-residential).
- Food services: If you offers food and drink on your premises, please review the protocols on restaurants, cafés, and pubs.

Related links

See the following links for additional information, guidance, or resources that may assist you in the development of your plan.

- Order of the provincial health officer – Gatherings and events
- Order of the provincial health officer – Food service establishments
- BC Centre for Disease Control – Faith-based organizations
- BC Centre for Disease Control – Choirs and Bands

For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control and the latest news from the government of British Columbia.

If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

Translated resources

Our key COVID-19 related resources are also available in Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), French, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.