



DIOCESE OF ONTARIO
The Anglican Church of Canada

Updated COVID-19 Guidelines

September 24th, 2021

The Province of Ontario continues in Step 3 of the “Roadmap to Reopen.” As the global and local situations continue to evolve, the diocese continues to work with Epidemiologists, local Health Units and other dioceses to evaluate and adapt. Our approach continues to be Risk Management focused - identifying risks, doing our best to contain/limit risks and mitigating the degree of risk. As additional policy changes and regulations are provided by the province, we will continue to adapt. Please note that we do not move forward with changes until the province has provided updated policy and guidance (not just announcements).

Following from the changes that were in the Sept 13th communication (effective on Sept 16th) the Diocese of Ontario will further adjust the Guidelines for our churches and organizations effective today (September 24th).

DIOCESE OF ONTARIO GUIDELINES

The Diocesan Guidelines (including the Vaccination Policy) establish the Minimum requirements and restrictions. Church Wardens and Incumbents can together decide to establish more stringent requirements and policy if they believe it is in the best interest of their community. In doing so, they accept the responsibility and potential liability that may come by doing so. If a parish implements changes to further tighten any policies or guidelines that may affect worship or pastoral care, the Bishop’s Office must be advised. The Ontario Human Rights Code requires the diocese, parishes and ministries provide accommodation up to the point of undue hardship to anyone who is unable to be vaccinated on the basis of substantiated protected grounds under the OHRC including medical or religion/creed.

Please see the attached Vaccination Policy for the Diocese which comes into effect with these Guidelines. Per the previous paragraph, the Wardens and Incumbent are permitted to make a decision to restrict access to services to those that can provide Proof of Vaccination or a Medical Exemption that meets the Province of Ontario requirements. In doing so, they must ensure there is no potential violation of Human Rights or creation of a situation where discrimination can occur. They must also make the Bishop’s Office aware of any change from the attached.

Parish ministries, including worship, faith formation, outreach, fellowship, and governance should continue to be conducted online or outdoors wherever possible. No one should feel obliged to attend in-person worship or any other in-person activity during the pandemic.

As it has since Step 3 was implemented, The **Capacity Limit** continues to be based on the number of people that can be seated with proper physical distancing. This applies to all churches, halls and individual rooms within them.

For **Indoor Services** (includes Weddings and Funerals) there is no change:

The maximum capacity for indoor services is now limited to the number of people who can maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person in the room. For calculating the total capacity, there must be two metres distancing between each and every person, regardless if they are from the same household.

This calculation of capacity with individual distancing is purely for the purpose of determining the maximum capacity of the church or room. At any indoor service of worship, the total number of people (including those leading worship, wardens, musicians, sides people, servers and congregation) may not exceed the capacity determined as above. Those who are in the **same household or family bubble** may be seated without distancing. There must be two metres distancing between each household or family bubble. However, regardless of how many are in household or family bubbles, the maximum capacity determined above may not be exceeded.

Outdoor Services continue to be capped at the number of people that can maintain a physical distance of two metres.

Masks must continue to be properly worn (covering the mouth, nose, and chin) at all times (indoors or outdoors) other than when taking the communion wafer from the hands to the mouth.

The guidelines for:

- **Liturgy and sacrament**
- **Communion will be in one-kind (bread only)**
- **Proper Signage and Marking of flow**
- **Self Assessment before entering or joining outdoors**
- **Sanitizing Hands**
- **Sanitizing High Touch surfaces**
- **Collecting and retaining Contact Information for all in attendance**
- **Natural ventilation to be facilitated as much as possible by having doors and windows open to refresh the air in churches. Fans which recirculate air should not be used.**

all remain **unchanged**.

Movement and interaction during services should continue to be limited, and there will be no congregational singing. No passing of Collection Plates. The Peace is to be non-Contact and maintain distancing.

High touch areas (light switches, door handles, handrails, etc) should continue to be cleaned regularly.

Books (Prayer, Bible) may be returned to pews. Given there is no congregational singing at this time, Hymn Books should not be returned to the pews yet.

For Outdoor Services, Congregational Singing and Choral Ensembles are permitted, provided that

- Physical Distancing is maintained at all times
- Masks are worn at all times

For Indoor Services, Congregational Singing is not permitted at this time. Choral Ensembles (Choirs) are permitted to a maximum of 6 singers, provided that

- Physical Distancing is maintained at all times (minimum of two metres, preferred to be three metres between singers)
- Masks are worn at all times
- All singers and musicians are fully vaccinated (per the Vaccination Policy)

Where **Drive-In Services** are held, each vehicle must be positioned at least two metres away from any other vehicle.

The **Pastoral Care** guidelines remain unchanged. Clergy and pastoral care teams should regularly communicate with parishioners by phone, email, social media, and other remote means, prioritizing those who may be isolated. Where possible, in person Pastoral Care should occur outdoors. Masks must be worn at all times.

Indoor meetings or social gatherings can have a maximum of the fewer of 25 people OR the number of people that can be seated/stand with two metres of physical distancing between each person. This would also apply to social gatherings such as After Church Socials (Coffee Hour), Wedding Receptions or Funerals. Please note that food and beverages can only be provided if there is table seating in place (with physical distancing) and service staff to deliver the food. No self-serve or buffet service (including coffee, tea, lemonade, etc.) is permitted. Indoor Choir Rehearsals are limited to 6 masked, physically distanced people in a well-ventilated space.

Outdoor social gatherings or meetings can have a maximum of the fewer of 100 people OR the number of people that can be seated/stand with two metres of physical distancing between each person. This would also apply to social gatherings such as After Church Socials (Coffee Hour), Wedding Receptions or Funerals. Please note that food and beverages can only be provided if there is table seating in place (with physical distancing) and service staff to deliver the food. No self-serve or buffet service (including coffee, tea, lemonade, etc.) is permitted.

Sunday School and Youth programs may take place, preferably outdoors or online. If in-person and indoors, no group may exceed 10 people (properly distanced, with masks and sanitization). This applies to all groups with under 18 year olds attending. Groups with all over 18 yrs of age are considered adults and subject to the Meeting and Social guidelines.

Nursery may be open for family use, but with no staff. Distancing, masks and sanitization required.

The number of people at an indoor, seated **Concert or other Non-Worship** public event may not exceed the number of people permitted in the building for a service of worship. Food and Beverage is not permitted.

Meal programs and Food Banks are required to continue with adequate hygienic and physical distancing controls in place. All local public health regulations must be followed.

Hall and Church Facility Rentals may resume, subject to the capacity limitations and the safety protocols (Masks, distancing, sanitizing, contact information, etc). Renters must conform to provincial regulations that may govern their activity (eg Personal Care, Fitness, Catering, etc.). Each group must provide the Wardens with a Safety Plan.

Thrift Stores now have a retail capacity which is governed by the total number of people that can maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person in the building. A sign must be posted in a conspicuous location, visible to the public that states the capacity limits for the building.

The transmission of the virus predominantly occurs through droplets in the air (aerosols). The best ventilation and therefore the lowest risk is outdoors. Where indoor activities (including worship) occur, you should make every effort to **maximize ventilation** (pushing air out of the building so that fresh air is drawn in). As per the previous guidelines, doors and windows should be open. Fans should only be used to push airflow out of the building, not to circulate it within building and never directly at any person.

The provincial regulations make it clear that the person(s) responsible for an organization or business shall ensure that the organization is in compliance with the regulations and recommendations, including physical distancing, sanitizing, wearing of masks, contact tracing etc. In the case of our churches, it would be the Wardens who are ultimately responsible.

Based on the guidelines from the province, we remain in Step 3 until 80% of the eligible population (aged 12 and over) has received one dose of a vaccine and 75% have received their second, with no regions having less than 70% fully vaccinated. It is unclear at this time how long we will remain in this stage.

Given the current situation and guidelines, the diocese expects that all our churches will have re-opened by the end of September. Any exceptions should be reviewed with the Diocesan Office by the Wardens on an individual basis.

We continue to approach the easing of safety measures with caution and concern for our communities. At the same time, there remains the risk of increased infection rates, the threat of the Variants of Concern and a “Fourth Wave.” We must remain vigilant, careful and ready to adapt as situations change. As the Church, together with the rest of society, contemplates the future, it is already clear that many congregations will continue to stream services and meet online as part of a “Hybrid” or “Mixed Mode” approach to worship in the wake of the pandemic. We will continue to work together to provide viable choices and alternatives for churches to determine the best solution for their community.

Any questions can be directed to Pandemic@ontario.anglican.ca

Our prayers are with all of our churches and people as together we take the next steps forward.

Vaccination Policy Attached (next page)

Diocese of Ontario

COVID-19 Vaccination Policy

Effective September 16th, 2021

Intent

The Diocese has a duty to ensure a safe workplace and to ensure that our spaces are safe for members of our community.

COVID-19 is a highly infectious viral disease which can be transmitted through respiratory droplets and touching mucous membranes after contact with a surface with virus on it. Consequences from being infected with COVID-19 can range from mild to severe, including death.

Achieving high immunization rates is a critical part of a range of measures and actions that can help prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 to those most vulnerable in our society. Vaccination against COVID-19 helps reduce the number of new cases and severe outcomes, including hospitalizations and death due to COVID-19.

Accordingly, the Diocese of Ontario has enacted this policy to increase the protection and safety of our parishioners, clergy, employees, and all of those we serve by reducing the transmission of COVID-19 in our church and office buildings and other ministry spaces. This policy will comply with all applicable laws and is based on guidance from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, and local health authorities, as applicable.

Applicability

Those functioning in ministry roles have been entrusted with responsibilities which include protection of the vulnerable. This policy thus applies to the following people:

- all clergy holding a Bishop's licence or permission.
- all licensed lay workers.
- all diocesan staff.
- all liturgical leaders including, but not limited to:
 - musicians, including vocalists;
 - readers, intercessors, servers, and communion assistants;
 - greeters, ushers, and sidespeople;
- wardens;
- all people ministering with children, youth, and young adults; and

- all people ministering with marginalized or vulnerable populations, including food security and other outreach ministries.

This policy does not apply to those under the age of 12 and those who have a Medical Exemption (as defined in the Provincial Policy. Those who are under the age of 12 are required to take additional infection and prevention control measures, including providing proof of a negative COVID-19 test (with that result having been obtained no more than 48 hours old prior to entry in the Workplace).

People in the roles set out above will be required to be fully immunized with a COVID-19 vaccine approved by Health Canada, unless a legal exemption has been granted, to serve in the Diocese of Ontario during this pandemic. To continue serving in these roles, persons designated above must have received their first dose of vaccine by September 30, 2021, and a compatible second dose (if an approved multiple-dose vaccine combination, whether the same or different from the first dose) no later than October 31, 2021. Vaccination status must also be kept current by obtaining booster doses as recommended by public health authorities. Additional information will be provided when known.

These protocols require proof of vaccination be shown on entry to church property, except for those entering for:

- worship services. Note: Subject to the other restrictions (eg 25 masked, seated, distanced people maximum with service of refreshments to a table), we have received guidance that Coffee Hour after church does not require checking of Proof of Vaccination as long as it immediately follows the service.
- Social Services (such as AA), Medical Services or other community service ministries

Records are not to be kept; the proof must be shown each time someone enters. Note: Tenants who rent church property are required to enforce these policies for their visitors.

As we welcome all in the name of Christ, worshippers are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated out of care for the vulnerable among us, although this will not be required at this time. As Christians, and through our baptismal covenant, we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, love our neighbour, and respect the dignity of every human being. We have a moral obligation to protect others and to set an example to the communities we serve. There is one crucial way we can love our neighbours, and that is to vaccinate ourselves against COVID-19 if we are able to do so. For those who are not vaccinated (by medical exemption or by choice), it is recommended that they join worship, fellowship, formation activities and governance meetings remotely to protect themselves and the rest of the community.

Policy Requirements

For clergy & diocesan staff

Proof of vaccination must be submitted via email to the diocesan Pandemic email (Pandemic@ontario.anglican.ca) Alternatively, arrangements can be made to share a copy of the vaccine confirmation via a Teams Meeting by video. Confirmation information (name and date of second /full vaccination) will be maintained, protected and stored securely by the Diocesan Executive Office and destroyed when no longer needed. This will not become part of an individual's permanent clergy or employment file. Supervisors, coworkers, and other parties shall not have access to the vaccine confirmation information or the details of the same, except to the extent necessary to implement this policy or as may be required by law.

For those who have a Medical Exemption, they will be required to obtain and confirm negative COVID Tests twice weekly.

For parish or regional ministry ministers

Each parish or regional ministry will maintain a record of the lay persons in these roles with an indication that they have provided proof of vaccination. A trusted person is to be assigned to visually check each person's vaccination confirmation and record the name of each person and the date of their second vaccination. Confirmation information will be stored securely and destroyed when no longer needed..

Individuals providing proof of vaccination are presumed, by the act of providing the proof, to be consenting to the diocese having this information.

Wardens and Incumbent/Priest In Charge are responsible to ensure that the requirements of this policy are met in their church or churches. All rental groups are required to follow this policy and represent to parishes that they are in compliance. It is necessary that the church inquire into the vaccination policy of the groups using the facilities. Where the policy of an outside organization does not meet the standards outlined in this policy, a discussion should take place between the churchwardens and the user organization to determine an appropriate course of action. If the renter is unable or unwilling to follow this policy the church must consider terminating or at least suspending the relationship for safety reasons.

Exemptions Under the *Human Rights Code*

Anyone, to whom this policy applies, be they clergy, lay worker, staff, parish, or regional minister, who qualifies for a valid legal exemption from vaccination under the Human Rights Code (the "Code") shall provide reasonable proof of the same. For example, those medically unable to be vaccinated must obtain a written doctor's note exempting them from this vaccination requirement and submit it to the Executive Officer.

Those with a satisfactory exemption will be required to take additional safety measures, including regularly providing proof of a negative COVID-19 test prior to in-person activities, at a frequency determined appropriate given the role they fulfill.

All persons requiring accommodation under the Code, whether it be in vaccination or testing, shall be provided with such accommodation up to the point of undue hardship. The Executive Officer or his delegate will engage with a person entitled to an exemption for Code related grounds under this section in a co-operative process to determine if reasonable accommodation is possible, including alternative ways a person might continue to safely work or minister. This will consist of an individual assessment based on the specific facts regarding the employee or volunteer's duties, the parish's or diocese's needs and the duty to accommodate. While there will always be an effort to provide reasonable and dignified accommodation, there may be situations where an individual cannot be accommodated short of undue hardship.

For those that may seek an exemption from vaccination for religious factors, there is neither legal nor doctrinal authority within the Anglican Church of Canada for any of its ministers to issue a religious vaccination exemption.

No Harassment

The Diocese will not tolerate harassment on the basis of, or related to, vaccination status. All individuals are entitled to work in a manner that supports their dignity and affords them

respect. Anyone who engages in harassment will be subject to consequences. For clergy and staff, this may include discipline up to and including dismissal or termination of appointment. For others, this may include suspension and/or termination of their role with the diocese.

Non-Compliance

Officeholders and employees who do not provide the required proof of vaccination – or evidence of valid Code based exemption or who fail/refuse to comply with testing requirement (or other measures implemented to address the risk of COVID-19) may be subject to disciplinary action, be restricted from attending certain locations/premises and/or be restricted from performing their duties. Those holding a designated position on a volunteer basis may be required to refrain from the exercise of their ministry.

Additional Measures

All directives of the Government of Ontario and local public health authorities must be always adhered to, including the following foundational pandemic guidance: minimizing the number of persons in a place at the same time, maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres, using well-constructed, well-fitting masks, practising good hand and respiratory hygiene, and staying home if feeling ill.

Amendments

This policy is developed in accordance with current medical and scientific recommendations in an ever-changing landscape. Recommendations from public health authorities can change as new information is received. The diocese will endeavor to remain current as more information and best practices become known, the policy may be amended by the Bishop of Ontario from time to time. Any changes will be communicated to those to whom this policy applies and those individuals are then required to comply with the amendments, including any updated measures.

For more information, please contact Pandemic@ontario.anglican.ca