

# DIOCESE OF ONTARIO

## Updated COVID-19 Guidelines

February 16, 2022

Effective February 17, 2022

The Province of Ontario has announced the most recent changes in regulations and guidance under the Re-opening Ontario protocols. We also continue to monitor the data/trends and consult with the three Public Health Units that are within our diocese.

As the church, we now need to again move forward as legal restrictions ease. Each church will again have flexibility in deciding how best to manage the risks while being aware that we are many members within one body. We are called to be responsible to one another and for one another, respecting and caring for the more vulnerable.

The individual circumstances in each parish will inform local decision-making and the aim of this guidance is to provide a framework and help define where there are choices. In every situation there is likely to be a range of feeling about risk that will need to be accommodated by our churches in a way appropriate to each of them.

It is also clear that online and hybrid worship services have opened new opportunities. Each church has responded uniquely to the opportunity and challenges of being online, developing both differing technical, platform and liturgical practice to meet their circumstances. We encourage online worship continuing as we move forward.

The Province of Ontario has provided some significant changes on COVID regulations, creating an opportunity for churches to remove limits on capacity during church services. Based on the new regulations, churches who wish to lift some of these restrictions will be required to restrict attendance to those who show proof of full vaccination (or a valid medical exemption) and personal ID. People who have been exempted from vaccination are not affected by this change. The requirements for all who participate in the leadership of worship remain in place (servers, choristers, etc.). Please note that the restrictions on congregational singing will affect capacity.

Full vaccination can be either two or three shots of an approved vaccine. The decision on whether to require the third is one which can be made in each church by its leadership.

The new guidelines return two options for churches as of **Thursday February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022**.

These options are specific to activities (e.g., worship, social, retail, etc.) not to the facility or organization. You may select a different Option for different activities (e.g., early service, late service, events, etc.). However, it is critical to ensure clear communication for anyone in your

congregation or community that may attend so expectations and requirements to enter are clear.

**Open Option — no proof of vaccination required to attend worship**

If a church (the Wardens and Incumbent) decides not to require proof of vaccination, you must continue to operate with capacity limited to the number of people who can be accommodated with physical distancing OR 30% of normal capacity, whichever is less. This capacity limitation will also apply where children who are not Fully Vaccinated or adults who have an Exemption from Vaccination are present. Worship leaders, Wardens, etc. must continue to be fully vaccinated. No Food and Drink can be served at social gatherings (including coffee hour) and gatherings are subject to a limit of 50 people (masked and distanced at all times).

**Restricted Option — proof of double vaccination required**

If a church decides to require that all attending (over the age of 5) provide proof of vaccination, then physical distancing and the associated capacity limits are no longer required. See below for additional restrictions if Congregational Singing is permitted. Food and drink can be served at coffee hour, subject to a limit of 50 people and with other restrictions. Masks are still required other than when seated in order to eat or drink.

For many churches, the Restricted Option is attractive as it lifts restrictions on capacity and seating. However, we strongly urge you to continue to exercise caution and allow for safety. For instance, we recommend you maintain physical distancing whenever possible. Similarly, if you decide to serve refreshments at social times, all those present must continue to wear masks. Like restaurants, masks can only be removed when seated and eating. People may not move around the room while unmasked.

Your decision on whether or not to limit in-person services to people with proof of vaccination will have to balance risks to people's physical health with pastoral and spiritual needs. This is not a small decision, given it restricts individual's access to worship, sacrament, and social activities no matter which option is chosen. In most churches, there will be a variety of perspectives and feelings. Care should be taken to ensure the choice made by the Incumbent and Wardens reflects the broader congregation and not just the loudest voices. Churches made these decisions in November, so in many cases this is a return to the earlier option selected.

Churches are not required to collect contact information for everyone who attends, however it continues to be a recommended best practice.

Masks should be properly worn (covering the mouth, nose, and chin). Whichever option you choose, **masks must be worn by everyone at all times** except when receiving the sacrament or while eating or drinking at a social event while seated (if permitted). There are no other exceptions at this time.

It is still recommended that any microphone (e.g., at a lectern) that is used by more than one person be wiped down with a disinfecting wipe between each use.

Some activities increase the risk of catching or passing on coronavirus. This most frequently happens where people are doing activities which generate more particles as they breathe heavily, such as singing or raising their voices. The risk is greatest where these activities take place when people are in close contact with others indoors, particularly in poorly ventilated spaces. The diocese is providing a Matching Grant program to assist in improving the safety of air inside church buildings.

All singers, including clergy if singing the liturgy, must remain masked at all times. In accordance with our **diocesan vaccination policy**, all musicians and choristers, whether paid or volunteer, must be fully vaccinated to participate in music ministry during worship services. Full vaccination is also required for Congregational Singing. Proof of vaccination must be provided.

All singers must be distanced from each other by a minimum 2 meters. The choir must be distanced from the congregation by a minimum of 4 metres. The previous limit of 6 choristers is now changed to the number of choristers which can be physical distanced in the chancel/choir stalls. Singing in procession is not permitted at this time.

Choir practices also require masks and physical distancing as described above. Choir practices must be held in a well-ventilated space and not exceed 90 minutes in length. Self-screening and contact tracing must be in place.

Only one wind instrumentalist may perform at a time and must be distanced by a minimum of 4 metres from others. If more than one wind instrument is desired, they must be separated from each other and the congregation by impermeable barriers (glass or plexiglass)

These policies on singing also apply to those using or renting our halls or church buildings (e.g., community choirs).

The guidance remains that singing remains a High-Risk activity. However, where the Incumbent and Wardens choose, Congregational Singing is now permitted with certain restrictions in place:

- The church must ensure all in attendance have provided Proof of Vaccination or a valid Medical Exemption
- Physical Distancing between households within the congregation. Individuals can be seated with members of their own household, but every member of the household must be seated at least 2m from every person outside their household.
- Masks must be worn at all times other than when receiving communion.

It is recognized that the distancing required for singing places a capacity limitation on the building. Given the higher risk of singing, this is not optional.

No parish or congregation should feel obliged to re-start choral music programs if they are uncomfortable or feel unable to do so safely.

Those responsible (Wardens, Incumbent, Renter Groups) for activities must ensure a written safety plan is prepared and available. The plan must describe the measures and procedures

which have or will be implemented to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19. (Provincial Regulation). It should be posted in a public place.

The previous Amber guidelines for:

- **Liturgy**
- **Communion in one-kind (bread only)**
- **Proper Signage and Marking of people flow**
- **Limiting movement and interaction during services as much as possible**
- **No passing of Collection Plates.**
- **The Peace being non-Contact and must maintain physical distance.**
- **Self Assessment before entering**
- **Sanitizing Hands**
- **Sanitizing High Touch surfaces**
- **Natural ventilation to be facilitated as much as possible by having doors and windows open to refresh the air in churches.**

all remain **unchanged** regardless of the option selected.

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

**Books** (Prayer, Bible) may be returned to pews

Annual Vestry meetings can occur online, in-person or hybrid (a mix of in-person and online). In-person meetings are now limited to 50 people if held indoors (100 if held outdoors). If required, special dispensation can be granted by the Bishop (on request) to delay an Annual Vestry beyond the March 15<sup>th</sup> deadline in the canons. This would apply where online is not practical or possible given the specifics of that congregation.

While not specifically required under these Guidelines, there are some best practices which churches should strongly consider:

- Continuing to keep a log of those in attendance at services, programs, and meetings. In the event of a positive case, it provides local leadership with the option of communicating to those present
- Reducing the risk of aerosol transmission by taking steps to improve ventilation, provide filtering or sterilization of the air in the buildings
- Increased cleaning and disinfecting, particularly "hi touch" surfaces
- Limiting time spent in closed spaces. Services should be no more than an hour in length

The focus on avoiding and preventing transmission of the COVID-19 virus has had an additional benefit in reducing transmission of Influenza (Flu) viruses as well. Continued care will assist in limiting the spread of colds and flu during the upcoming season.

Church leadership should review the guidance provided at <http://www.ontario.ca/exposed> for guidance on actions if someone in leadership or the congregation has been exposed or has contracted COVID-19.

The key guiding principle of our response to the pandemic is and always will be the need to preserve life and health. We take one step at a time as we move forward.

The last two years have been a difficult and at times, stressful journey. A number of times it has felt like we start to move forward to a more “normal” state of life and then new developments in the pandemic pull us back into tighter restrictions and protocols. The resulting frustration, sense of loss and uncertainty has been difficult for all of us.

The current trending in data and the resulting change in protocols and guidance has us easing restrictions. We remain cautious, but hopeful. As we know, things continue to change on an all too regular basis. Church leaders should continue to have contingency plans in place in case there are responses required, either within that church or across the diocese.

The Province has announced its intention to further modify regulations on March 1<sup>st</sup>. When the detailed regulations are available, we will review next steps in our diocesan guidelines and protocols.

*We are not people of fear:  
we are people of courage.  
We are not people who protect our own safety:  
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.  
We are not people of greed:  
we are people of generosity.  
We are your people God,  
giving and loving,  
wherever we are,  
whatever it costs  
For as long as it takes  
wherever you call us  
AMEN*

## APPENDIX A) – Quick Comparison

	Open Option	Restricted Option
Building Capacity	Based on Existing Distancing guidelines or 30% (whichever is less)	Pre-COVID Fire Dept maximum capacity
Physical Distancing (between people in the same residence “bubble”)	2m minimum <u>required</u>	<u>Recommend</u> maintaining 2m as much as possible  2m <u>Required</u> if Congregational Singing
Masks during Worship	Required – other than when consuming sacrament	Required – other than when consuming sacrament
Chorale Ensemble Singing	Maximum of 6 singers in a choral ensemble/choir. Each person must be masked, distanced, and provide proof of full vaccination.	For Choral Ensembles, the number of choristers is limited to the available space in the chancel/stalls with 2m physical distancing. All singers must be distanced from each other by a minimum 2 meters and from the congregation by a minimum of 4 metres
Congregational Singing	No Congregational Singing	If the church choses to have congregational singing, it must ensure all in attendance have provided Proof of Vaccination or a valid Medical Exemption  Physical Distancing between households within the congregation. Individuals can be seated with members of their own household, but every member of the household must be seated at least 2m from every person outside their household.

		Masks must be worn at all times when singing.
Social Activities	Maximum of 50 people. All must maintain distancing.  If Proof of Vaccination or Exemption is not required, no food or drink may be served. Masks must be worn at all times.	Maximum of 50 people. All must maintain distancing.  If seated at a table, masks can be removed, but must be worn when moving to or from the table. Food can be picked up and carried to the table. Must maintain 2m distancing between households.
Pre-Assessments	Required for entry	Required for entry
Contact Tracing	Recommended	Recommended
Parish Meetings (incl Parish Advisory Council and Vestry)	Wardens and Incumbent may choose not to require Proof of Vaccination or Medical Exemption.  All must be physically distanced  All must wear masks at all times.  Maximum of 50 people	Wardens and Incumbent may choose to require Proof of Vaccination or Medical Exemption.  All must be physically distanced  All must wear masks at all times.  Maximum of 50 people
Formation	Formation activities such as Bible or book studies, prayer groups, confirmation classes, and Sunday School for children and youth activities may be held. The number permitted is the fewer of 50 persons or the number that may be safely physically distanced in the room being used.	Formation activities such as Bible or book studies, prayer groups, confirmation classes, and Sunday School for children may be held. The number permitted is the fewer of 50 persons or the number that may be safely physically distanced in the room being used.
Meal Programs and Food Banks	Maximum of 50 people or the number that may be safely	Capacity of a hall is limited to the number of people that

	<p>physically distanced in the room being used. Masks must be worn, and physical distancing maintained.</p> <p>Those responsible must have a prepared Safety Plan</p>	<p>may be seated while maintaining Physical Distancing between tables. If seated at a table, masks can be removed, but must be worn when moving to or from the table. Food can be picked up and carried to the table. Required to maintain 2m distancing when not seated. All local Public Health regulations must be followed</p> <p>Recommended that Kitchen staff maintain Physical Distancing OR have impermeable barriers between workstations.</p> <p>Those responsible must have a prepared Safety Plan</p>
Fund Raising Events	<p>Maximum of 50 people or the capacity limit of the space based on physical distancing. All must maintain distancing. Food or drink may not be served. Masks must be worn</p>	<p>Capacity is limited by the number of people that can be physically distanced at least 2m in the space being used.</p> <p>Indoor fundraising and social activities, including concerts and bazaars, may be organized, provided all participants show proof of vaccination, distancing is able to be maintained in the event space and masks requirements are in place.</p> <p>Food or beverages can only be provided as per the restrictions above (Seated)</p>
Concert Events	<p>Not permitted (Proof of Vaccination is mandatory)</p>	<p>Maximum of 50% capacity</p> <p>Individuals can be seated with members of their own household, but every member of the household</p>



		<p>must be seated at least 2m from every person outside their household.</p> <p>Those responsible for the event must prepare a safety plan</p>
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## Signage

Regulations require that signs be displayed in entries and other conspicuous places. You may find resources to download and print:

For Hastings & Prince Edward	<a href="https://hpepublichealth.ca/healthy-workplaces/">https://hpepublichealth.ca/healthy-workplaces/</a>
For KFLA	<a href="https://www.kflaph.ca/en/healthy-living/covid-19-signage.aspx">https://www.kflaph.ca/en/healthy-living/covid-19-signage.aspx</a>
For Leeds Grenville Lanark	<a href="https://healthunit.org/coronavirus/">https://healthunit.org/coronavirus/</a>
For Guidance on Exposure	<a href="http://www.ontario.ca/exposed">http://www.ontario.ca/exposed</a>