

July 22, 2020

Dear Faith Based Groups and CAOs for the municipalities in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, and of the four First Nations located in Simcoe Muskoka:

Further to a letter provided to you on June 12, 2020, the Province of Ontario outlined plans to move to Phase 2, Stage 3 of the Re-Opening Ontario Plan on Monday, July 13<sup>th</sup>. Stage 3 commenced on Friday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The initiation of this stage is accompanied by [Ontario Regulation 364/20, Rules for Areas in Stage 3](#). In addition, as of Monday, July 13, 2020, [face coverings](#) are required for the public when entering into a public indoor space in Simcoe Muskoka. As a result of the requirement for [face coverings](#) in indoor spaces and the requirements of [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#), a number of recommendations and requirements provided in the provincial guidance document for [Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#) on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 have been updated. This communication provides places of worship clarification in regards to singing, playing of instruments and face coverings that I will expand on below in seeking consistency across places of worship in Simcoe and Muskoka moving forward.

### **Singing, public speaking and face coverings**

- Face coverings must be worn by everyone inside the place of worship at all times, unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the face covering for services provided by the place of worship (such as eating/drinking by anyone, or public speaking/singing by a designated member). Where public speaking or singing is required as a part of the activity within the faith-based organizations by a designated member or a faith leader, masks may be removed for the purposes of public speaking where sufficient distance (> 4 metres) is provided between the speaker(s) and participants. In the event of loud speaking or any singing simultaneously during a sermon or ceremony, masks may be removed with sufficient barrier(s) in place, such as glass or Plexiglas that forms a complete barrier between the speaker(s)/singer(s) and others.
- Singing by participants in the service in an indoor environment continues to be prohibited at this time. Since COVID-19 is spread primarily through droplets, singing by participants is prohibited given that singing is known to increase droplet spread.

### **Choir members and other performers (e.g. musicians) and face coverings**

- Singers or performers do not need to wear a mask while they are rehearsing or performing. Singers and players of brass or wind instruments must be separated from any spectators by Plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier. Every performer and other person who provides work for the business or place of worship must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person, except, if it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal. During periods of rest in between performances, face coverings should be used.
- Other musicians using instruments that are not brass or wind (e.g. guitars) are required to use face coverings and must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person, except;
  - If it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal,
  - Where necessary for the purposes of health and safety.

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## Child Care

- Places of worship are permitted to have child care during faith services. Such child care should adhere to the [Province's guidance documents on summer day camps](#).

In keeping with our communications to places of worship on June 12, 2020, and further to the provincial guidance document for [Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#), the [Stage 3 Regulation](#) and the [face covering instructions](#), the health unit highlights the following updated public health guidance to protect faith leaders, volunteers and members of the public who participate in places of worship:

## Protecting members of the public, staff and volunteers

- Indoor celebrations (e.g. weddings, funerals) are limited in attendance to 30 per cent of building capacity. Ceremonies taking place outdoors are limited to 100 attendees. For both indoor and outdoor ceremonies, those attending must follow proper health and safety advice, including practising physical distancing from people who are not from the same household or their established 10-person social circle. Receptions held before or after a celebration are limited to 50 persons if the meeting or event is indoors or 100 persons if the meeting or event is outdoors.
- Members of the public, staff and volunteers should stay home and get tested if they feel ill with COVID-19 [symptoms](#). The use of the Province's [self-assessment tool](#) should be encouraged before coming to the place of worship.
- Maintain up-to-date contact information for staff and volunteers who attend in-person services.
- Record who is working/volunteering each day and attending group activities and events. Staff and volunteers must report illness immediately to their manager, and stay home if they are sick to [self-isolate](#).
- Provide information and training to workers and volunteers about appropriate physical distancing, facility-specific risk-reduction measures, and proper respiratory and hygiene practices.
- Encourage proper [respiratory etiquette](#) and [hand hygiene](#). Make hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol available at the entrances and exits of the place of worship.

## Facilities

- Commonly touched surfaces (e.g. door handles, light switches, washrooms, ceremonial objects, etc.) should be frequently [cleaned and disinfected](#).
- Consider the use of one-way directional arrows for those attending services.
- Print and post signs and information at entrances and exits of the church for [screening](#) and [physical distancing](#) and [hand hygiene](#) & [respiratory etiquette](#).

## Higher Risk Activities

- Shared items for the purposes of a service should be cleaned and sanitized before and after use. Participants in services should be encouraged to bring their own items if possible. Where cleaning and sanitizing of objects is not possible (e.g. books), these should be discouraged.
- For the purposes of donations, a central location for participants to deposit is encouraged to avoid passing of containers between individuals.
- The use of rented facilities for the general public within places of worship should follow gathering restrictions in accordance with the existing emergency orders for social gatherings (up to 50 persons in an indoor environment while maintaining a physical distance of two metres apart).

A copy of this letter along with other COVID resources are provided on the health unit's webpage dedicated to COVID-19 at <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19>. Questions about this letter and best practices can be directed to our Health Connection line at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520).

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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