

COVID-19 Fact Sheet

Advice for Religious and Faith Communities

This fact sheet provides advice for religious leaders, faith-based organisations and faith communities to reduce the risks of COVID-19 as they continue to practice their faith, offer services and maintain connection with community members.

People who are unwell or have symptoms

- > Any person who is unwell or has symptoms of COVID-19 (even if symptoms are mild) must stay home and should get tested for COVID-19.
- > Symptoms of COVID-19 may include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath or loss of taste and smell.

Hygiene

- > Wash hands regularly with soap and water, or use alcohol-based sanitiser.
- > Encourage healthy hygiene among attendees by providing facilities for hand hygiene.
- > Provide clean tissues and bins for tissue disposal.
- > If ablutions are part of the faith practice, recommend that these are done before attending the place of worship where possible to avoid use of communal facilities.

Cleaning

- > Regularly clean areas and sites where people gather.
- > Thoroughly clean frequently touched surfaces and objects (for example, door handles, light switches).

Gatherings

- > Masks must be worn at a place of worship where capacity exceeds 75% of normal occupancy, if less than 75% of capacity, no masks are required.
- > Consider conducting services remotely/virtually to allow those who cannot attend in person to continue participating.
- > Keep 1.5 metres distance between individuals (this does not apply to family groups).
- > Rooms/areas must not have more than 3 people per 4 square metres. The maximum number of attendees is 200 people.
- > Seating, prayer and other activities that involve groups should be arranged in a way that promotes physical distancing.
- > Ensure physical distancing in areas where crowds may gather, such as at entrances or exits of buildings.
- > Consider offering multiple services at different times to reduce number of attendees at any one service.
- > Consider hosting a gathering outdoors if possible. If not, ensure adequate ventilation indoors.

Singing

- > Singing increases the distance that droplets from the mouth can travel, and spacing further than 1.5 metres is advised if possible in this situation.
- > Avoid singing together as a congregation. Consider designating one person, or a very small group of people who can maintain physical distancing, to sing at gatherings.

Physical contact between people

- > Where greetings usually involve people touching each other (for example, hugging, kissing, shaking hands), encourage new forms of greeting that do not involve physical contact.
- > Avoid rituals that involve touching between individuals.

Sharing or communal handling of objects

- > Use single-serve portions of food and drink, including wine and wafers used in communion, and avoid shared portions from communal containers.
- > If utensils cannot be cleaned and sanitised at time of use in a dishwasher or food-grade sanitiser, consider single-use utensils.
- > Avoid sharing or touching objects that are usually shared or handled by multiple people, such as statues or icons, fonts of holy water, and prayer or hymn books. Provide each participant individually with the object or objects involved in the ritual or practice and clean in between each service or gathering.
- > For communion, where possible, defer the practice, especially for those who are at higher risk of severe infection such as older people and those who have chronic medical issues. If using communal instruments, these must be limited to one close contact group (e.g. a family in a shared living arrangement) at a time and cleaned and sanitised between different groups. For parishioners who are not members of close contact groups, the use of individual chalices or spoons for each person is recommended.
- > Individual prayer mats should be used rather than communal floor surfaces. Encourage people to bring their own prayer mats.

Funeral practices

- > If the faith tradition involves washing or shrouding the body of a deceased loved one, people conducting these activities should wear personal protective equipment such as gloves, and additional equipment such as gowns and face masks if there may be splashing of bodily fluids.
- > Viewing the body of the deceased should not involve touching of the body.

Role of faith leaders

- > Religious leaders and members of the faith community are strongly encouraged to maintain connection to other members, especially those who are isolated. They are also encouraged, where possible, to provide support to those who are vulnerable such as older people or those with a disability.
- > Leaders are in a unique position as role models to adapt practices to maintain connection in their faith communities while reinforcing these recommendations to keep South Australia COVID safe.

For more information

SA COVID-19 Information Line 1800 253 787

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019

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Last updated 7 July 2021