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## COVID-19 Church Gathering Restriction Guidance

On June 14, 2021, Premier John Horgan and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry outlined step 2 of [BC's Restart Plan](#) for gradually and carefully easing COVID-19 restrictions. The existing province-wide [order](#) that includes gathering restrictions continues to remain in place based on direction of the Provincial Health Order, with a few immediate changes to indoor and outdoor church services and indoor weddings. The [variance for outdoor worship services](#) was updated and a new [variance for indoor worship services](#) was issued on June 15, 2021. The following represents our best understanding of the information provided by the BC Government and its implications for our churches.

**Disclaimer:** These are not directives that the District will be policing or enforcing, but rather guidelines we believe are wise that your Board and pastoral leadership should consider and work through. There may be legitimate areas of interpretation where the implementation in your church context could look different than in other settings, however, please be aware of your responsibility and the potential consequences should you choose to deviate from provincial guidelines and the guidance provided below.

### Gathering Restrictions

**The current province-wide [order](#) given by Dr. Henry limits personal indoor gatherings to five people from different households or one other household. Outdoor personal gatherings of up to 50 people are allowed.**

**A [variance](#) to the order was issued on June 15, 2021 that allows for in-person indoor worship services with 50 people present or 10% of fire code occupancy, whichever is greater.**

**An updated [variance](#) to the order was also issued on June 15, 2021 that allows for outdoor in-person worship services with 50 people present. Attendees are no longer required to remain seated.**

**Pastors may continue to visit the home of a church member or congregant to provide spiritual care.**

Please note that a worship service includes a funeral and/or baptism that takes place during a regular service, but not a funeral, baptism, or wedding that are held on their own.

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We encourage your Board and leadership to carefully plan in accordance with the restrictions for outdoor worship services and to prepare for potential changes in light of changing restrictions.

### **Indoor Worship Services**

Worship services may be held indoors for a maximum of 50 people or 10% of fire code occupancy, whichever is greater, inclusive of all worship leaders, readers, speakers, musicians, and volunteers. Four extra people are allowed to ensure compliance with the [variance order](#). All attendees must practice physical distancing of at least 2 metres. Masks are required to be worn by all in attendance, with the following exceptions allowing for them to be removed:

- A worship leader or soloist when singing
- Musicians who need to do so to play their instrument (ex. flute)
- Preachers when speaking
- Readers when reading aloud

Worship teams are no longer limited in size, however, only the worship leader or a soloist is allowed to sing, and congregational singing is not allowed. A 3-metre separation of physical distancing should be maintained for the worship leader and a speaker between other participants, but if this is not possible, masks must be worn.

During the service, items must not be passed (ex. cup or bread for Communion, collection baskets for tithes) but single use containers may be used. Social gatherings are not allowed either before, during, or after the service.

### **Outdoor Worship Services**

Worship services may be held outdoors for a maximum of 50 people, inclusive of all worship leaders, readers, speakers, musicians, and volunteers. Four extra people are allowed to ensure compliance with the [variance order](#). All attendees must practice physical distancing of at least 2 metres.

Worship teams are allowed and not subject to a size limitation, however, only the worship leader or a soloist is allowed to sing, and congregational singing is not allowed.

During the service, items must not be passed (ex. cup or bread for Communion, collection baskets for tithes) but single use containers may be used. Social gatherings are not allowed either before or after the service.

### **Pre-Registration, Health Checks, and Contact Tracing**

Indoor and outdoor worship services are required to pre-register attendees to control attendance and allow for contact tracing. Each person's first and last name and telephone or email address must be collected and stored for 30 days and then the information must be destroyed. As part of pre-registration, a health check must be completed, and any person who does not pass the health check may not attend the service.

The [BC CDC Guidance on indoor and outdoor worship services](#) state that organizers must caution the following people about attending an in-person worship service if they are at [higher risk](#) of serious complications from COVID-19.

### **Multiple Services & Concurrent Worship Services**

Multiple services may be held in a day provided there is enough time between services for cleaning and for those attending to depart without interacting with the next incoming group of attendees.

For churches with larger facilities, multiple concurrent worship services may be held, including concurrent indoor and outdoor services provided the following is in place:

- each group of 50 attendees is entirely separate from any other group
- each group has no contact with anyone outside their group (no one may go between groups, including pastoral or church staff)
- there is a separate entrance for each group
- there are separate washrooms for each group

Health and hygiene practices must be in place for all groups.

### **Personal Gatherings**

[Step 2 of BC's Restart Plan](#) allows for personal gatherings of up to five people indoors or one other household. Home-based watch parties and small group meetings are considered personal/social gatherings and fall under these limitations.

Groups of up to 50 people may meet in person outdoors. Groups are reminded that gatherings should maintain physical distancing and do contract tracing. Individuals may still visit a church for personal prayer.

### Support Groups

Formal in-person meetings, health-focused support group meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous, and critical service meetings such as a Board business meetings and Annual General Meetings may still take place in the church provided physical distancing and health and hygiene practices are in place, and with no more than 50 people present. Churches are encouraged to review their safety plans and ensure that they are implemented for each formal meeting.

As a reminder, all in-person gatherings must keep a record of each attendee's first and last name and telephone or email address for at least 30 days to allow for contact tracing should an outbreak of COVID-19 occur.

### Weddings, Funerals, and Baptisms

**Indoor [weddings, funerals, and baptisms](#) are allowed to take place, but are restricted to a maximum of 50 people in attendance, including the officiant and any event staff, with a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. Two extra people are allowed to ensure compliance. Receptions associated with weddings, funerals, or baptisms are not allowed inside homes or venues.**

**Outdoor weddings, funerals, and baptisms are allowed to take place, but are restricted to a maximum of 50 people in attendance, including the officiant if they are also the event organizer.**

For outdoor funerals and weddings, event organizers and staff present are not included in the 50-person limit. However, if the event organizer also acts as the officiant, that person is included in the 50-person limit.

As a reminder, weddings must be officiated in person. Physical distancing and health and hygiene practices should also be in place.

For funerals, social gatherings before, during, and after the service are not allowed. For outdoor weddings, an associated reception may take place with a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. An additional four people may attend outdoor funerals and weddings to ensure compliance.

The [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) has provided guidance on organizing a funeral or memorial service that may be helpful. It may also be helpful to reach out to a local funeral home for further information.

We suggest that as a leadership and Board you determine what your approach in ensuring the safety of participants will be for weddings, funerals, and baptisms.

### Children's and Youth Ministry Gatherings

Under the [Provincial Health Order](#), programs for children and youth are allowed provided that a COVID-19 safety plan is in place, health and hygiene practices are in place, and physical distancing is maintained. Only the youth participating, leaders, and persons whose presence is necessary to care for a child or youth participating are allowed to attend.

The 50-person limit does not apply to staff or volunteer leaders but does include presenters or speakers. This means that 50 people may attend a church worship service or event in addition to church staff and volunteer leaders.

During any gathering, attendees who leave are not allowed to be replaced with other attendees, and the number of attendees must be monitored to ensure that the maximum number in the church's safety plan is not exceeded.

In large facilities with more than one gathering area, the 50-person limit applies to each separate area within the facility, not to the facility as a whole.

As well, the [order](#) allows multiple concurrent gatherings for a youth event provided the following are in place:

- each group of 50 attendees is entirely separate from any other group
- each group has no contact in the building with anyone outside their group
- there is a separate entrance for each group
- there are separate washrooms for each group

The emphasis has been that in any gathering, physical distancing remains critical to reducing the spread of COVID-19 and that the 50-person gathering restriction applies provided that physical distancing of two (2) metres can be maintained for all attendees. Health and hygiene practices must be in place for all groups, and cleaning and sanitization must be cleaned in between events where no attendees are present.

### Workplaces

Employers are asked to review their [COVID-19 safety plans](#) and ensure that they are being carefully implemented. Employees have been asked to monitor

## COVID-19 Church Gathering Restriction Guidance

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themselves daily and stay home if they have any symptoms. Masks are required for shared work areas (ex. meeting rooms, kitchens, hallways) and where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Dr. Henry has asked that all office-based employers support and enable employees to work from home wherever possible to help reduce transmission of the virus, although a gradual shift to in-office work is part of the [Restart Plan](#). We encourage you to consider making it possible for your church staff to work from home until a full return to working in offices is possible.

### Resources

BC Centre for Disease Control – Event Planning (Weddings & Funerals)

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/event-planning>

BC Centre for Disease Control/BC Ministry of Health – Guidance for Holding Low Risk Worship Services

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-guidance-worship-services.pdf>

CPD COVID-19 Resources

<https://pacificdistrict.ca/covid-19-church/>

Provincial Health Officer Orders, Notices, and Guidance

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

Provincial Health Officer Province-Wide Order

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/restrictions>

Provincial Health Officer Order Variance – Indoor Worship Services

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-variance-indoor-worship.pdf>

Provincial Health Officer Order Variance – Outdoor Worship Services

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-variance-outdoor-worship.pdf>

WorkSafeBC Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation/faith-based-organizations>

**The District Office is here to support you as you navigate these changes!**

Please contact our office at 604-372-1922 or [cpdoffice@pacificdistrict.ca](mailto:cpdoffice@pacificdistrict.ca) if you have any questions.