

# **BEST PRACTICES FOR CHURCH SAFETY (COVID-19)**

**Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Covid-19 Infection in Places of Worship**

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# Outline

- **Pre-preparation (getting ready to go to church)**
- **Preparation (At the site of worship - building)**
- **Selection process (who can attend)**
- **Types of services**
- **After completion of the service**
- **Emergency equipment - Procedure**

# Pre-preparation (getting ready to go to church)

## Physical distancing when around other people:

- Clean set of clothes
- Don cloth mask and if possible personal hand sanitizer
- Keep accessories to the minimum
- Keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres (2 arm lengths) from others
- Do NOT shake hands, hug or fist bump / elbow bump. Keep your distance. Greet in other ways i.e. bow or wave
- Don't touch each other unless you need to assist someone

# Preparation (At the site of worship - building)

- Cleaning of building:
- Access control – one point of entry
- Register to capture attendance and seat allocation.
- Adequate supply of water, soap, hand sanitiser, paper towels
- Screening: questionnaire and temperature check
- Signage at the entrance as well at key points inside the building: reminder about the key measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

# Selection process (who can attend the service?)

- Congregants that are elderly (>60) and those that have chronic diseases are at higher risk for severe illness and should be discouraged from attending.
- Symptomatic persons cannot attend
- Persons awaiting covid-19 test results
- Someone who was a close contact of covid19 infected person

# Types of services

- a) **NORMAL SERVICE**
- b) Baptism Service
- c) Communion Service
- d) **FUNERAL SERVICE**
- e) Other activities e.g. soup kitchen, bazaar, church office

- **Normal Service**

- Designate directions of flow within the building and identify areas of potential bottlenecks. Address bottlenecks by placing a staff member/ barrier or signs to direct individuals.
- Avoid any bi-directional flows.
- Open doors and windows both to maximise ventilation and to prevent door handles and windows from being touched by multiple people.

# Normal services cont.

- Singing: where the mask obscures the sound. In this case a visor can be used on its own. But the area around the speaker/singer must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected when they have completed their speech/songs.
- Microphones
- Offerings



- **Funeral Service**

- Ceremonies such as funerals may be performed as long as the prescribed limits on the number of attendees (currently set at 50 people) and guidance relating to transmission prevention is followed.
- Physical distancing of 1.5 metres must be maintained at all times.
- Attendees should disperse as soon as the ceremony has been concluded.

# Funeral services cont.

- If the ceremony is conducted in more than one venue (e.g. church and graveyard) then all precautions taken at the first venue must be implemented at the second venue as well (mask, hand sanitising, social distancing)
- Handling of graveyard equipment such as spades should not be allowed.
- There should be no gathering for refreshments or meals after the ceremony.

# Emergency equipment - Procedures?

- The person should be isolated in a designated space and transported to their home/a testing centre asap.
- Provincial hotline for advice
- Spillage package
- Additional PPE

# After completion of the service

- Do not allow individuals to gather at the exit after the service. Request congregants to leave the area straight after the service.
- Frequently interacted with and touched surfaces and objects should be cleaned and disinfected between services/prayers if there are multiple services in the day. This includes seats, pews, door handles, railings, counters, etc.
- Use soap and water to clean areas where possible. Then disinfect with a diluted bleach solution. Dilute 30ml of bleach per litre of water.

**END OF SESSION**

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# Clarification on misconceptions

The prolonged use of medical masks\* when properly worn, DOES NOT cause CO<sub>2</sub> intoxication nor oxygen deficiency

The prolonged use of medical masks can be uncomfortable. However, it does not lead to CO<sub>2</sub> intoxication nor oxygen deficiency. While wearing a medical mask, make sure it fits properly and that it is tight enough to allow you to breathe normally. Do not re-use a disposable mask and always change it as soon as it gets damp.

Thermal scanners CANNOT detect COVID-19

Thermal scanners are effective in detecting people who have a fever. They cannot detect people who are infected with COVID-19. There are many causes of fever. Call your healthcare provider if you need assistance or seek immediate medical care if you have fever.

Can I get covid-19 from food?

There is currently no evidence that people can catch COVID-19 from food or food packaging. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and the transmission route is through person-to-person contact and through direct contact with respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

# Clarification on misconceptions cont.

## WHO views on masks:

Masks should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy of measures to suppress transmission and save lives; the use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide an adequate level of protection against COVID-19. You should also maintain a minimum physical distance of at least 1 metre from others, frequently clean your hands and avoid touching your face and mask.

**Medical masks** can protect people wearing the mask from getting infected, as well as can prevent those who have symptoms from spreading them. WHO recommends the following groups use medical masks

- Health workers
  - Anyone with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, including people with mild symptoms
  - People caring for suspect or confirmed cases of COVID-19 outside of health facilities
- Medical masks are also recommended for these at-risk people, when they are in areas of widespread transmission and they cannot guarantee a distance of at least 1 metre from others:
- People aged 60 or over
  - People of any age with underlying health conditions
- **Non-medical, fabric masks** are being used by many people in public areas, but there has been limited evidence on their effectiveness and WHO does not recommend their widespread use among the public for control of COVID-19. However, for areas of widespread transmission, with limited capacity for implementing control measures and especially in settings where physical distancing of at least 1 metre is not possible – such as on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments – WHO advises governments to encourage the general public to use non-medical fabric masks.

# References

- Circular H123 of 2020: guidelines for the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Infection at places of worship in the Western Cape
- WHO.int