



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS – 30 March 2021

New information is in blue.

From 6:00pm on Friday 26 March 2021, Victoria further relaxed its COVIDSafe settings.

The link to the Religion and Ceremony information is linked [HERE](#)

A fact sheet for Religion and Ceremony is linked [HERE](#)

**NEW Record Keeping Requirements have changed.** The Victorian Government QR or Application Programming Interface will be required to meet the one person per two square meter rule. An amnesty applies until 23 April 2021.

In order that the [1 per 2 square meter rule](#) applies, places of worship must use the free [Victorian Government QR Service](#) or [Victorian Government Application Programming Interface](#) linked digital record keeping system from March 26 (a 28-day compliance amnesty will be in place to **23 April 2021**). This means that recording on paper and scanning hard copy records will no longer meet the criteria for the [1 per 2 square metre rule](#) to apply. In turn this means the [1 per 4 square meter rule](#) applies. (Note the square meter rules also include the need to preserve a physical distancing of 1.5 meters between people who are not from the same household)

The Industry Restart Guidelines for Religion and Ceremonies dated 26 February 2021 is linked [HERE](#)

### Can we gather in worship?

Religious gatherings, wedding and funerals can be held indoors or outdoors. There are no group limits and ceremonies can occur at the same time.

All venues must use electronic record keeping through the free [Victorian Government QR Service](#) or [Victorian Government Application Programming Interface](#) linked digital system (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty in place to **23 April 2021**). If you do this then you can apply the [two square metre rule](#).

It is still recommended you wear a face mask when at a gathering or when you cannot maintain 1.5 metres distance from other people.

For weddings, funerals and religious gatherings, if a service is conducted in a private home, the private gathering limit applies (100 visitors). You should not attend a wedding, funeral or religious gathering if you are feeling unwell. Stay home and get tested.

A **COVID safe plan** must be in place. (See more on COVIDsafe plans later in this document)

*From a phone call to the DHHS COVID hotline: Members of the same household may sit together but at a distance of 1.5 metres from the next individual or family group [DHHS Job ID 289389]*

### What are record keeping requirements

All congregations must apply the [two square metre rule](#) and use electronic record keeping through the free [Victorian Government QR Service](#) or [Victorian Government Application Programming Interface](#) linked digital system (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty in place to April 23).

If congregations are unable to use the electronic QR code record keeping they will need to observe the [1 person per 4 square meter rule](#) and continue to keep manual records.

### **Do I need to wear a mask to worship?**

From 11.59pm, Friday 26 February 2021, face masks will no longer be mandatory in all public indoor settings. Churches do not appear on the list of mandatory locations. You must carry a face mask at all times when you leave home, unless you have a lawful exemption. *It is recommended you wear a face mask when you can't keep 1.5 metres distance from other people.*

### **Can we participate in Holy Communion?**

According to the Chief Health Officers advice dated 27 October (28 October for Regional Victoria) conducting a Eucharist service is permitted noting no sharing of crockery, utensil, vessels or other equipment is allowed.

### **Can we pass around the offering plate?**

Minimising multiple handling of items reduces the risk of infection therefore it is recommended that the offering be placed in a receptacle by each member as they leave (or perhaps on the way back to their seat after communion or other appropriate time) instead of passing the offering plate from hand to hand.

Those counting the offering should take every care when handling money in order to reduce their own risk. Please provide sanitiser and/or gloves in the area where counting takes place.

This is an excellent time to consider promoting [Regular Electronic Giving](#) through the LLL.

### **Can I sing at a place of worship?**

Yes, singing or chanting can occur as part of a religious ceremony, wedding or funeral.

Group singing is safest when the following measures are applied:

- singing outside or in a well-ventilated room (with windows open)
- physical distancing of at least 2 metres between each person while singing
- short performances (of less than an hour)
- wearing a mask when singing indoors
- singing softly.

Fans, free standing or ceiling, are not recommended for use in enclosed indoor spaces for singing. Performers should be 5 meters from the audience where practical.

### **Can we recommence hospitality at worship? And for non worship events**

*It is recommended that single use items are used to serve food or drink. It is recommended that one person serves or distributes food or drinks. For example, one person uses the urn for hot water for tea, (and other consumables)*

*For non worship events please click the link to Industry Restart Guidelines for Hospitality [HERE](#). Note this document is aimed at industry so primarily addresses employee issues. The diagram on page 6 provides good guidance on considerations for an event where food is to be served. The event organiser and SP3 coordinator should develop a new event plan or modify an existing plan to take COVIDsafe principles into account*

## **Can we hold a public event?**

For information on holding a public event click [HERE](#) and / or please call the Coronavirus hotline 1 800 675 398. A three tier system has been introduced. A self assessment tool for public events can be found on these pages to determine the category of your event.

## **Can a pastor visit a person in their home for pastoral care and/or home communion?**

Older people are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, so it is important that you take extra steps to keep them safe. While record keeping is usually in the context of the workplace building environment, because a pastoral visit is in the context of a workplace, record keeping for 28 days should still be maintained – for instance in a work diary or calendar for contact tracing purposes if needed

Physical distancing should still be maintained as far as is practicable.

*Visiting Care Facilities – Read about visiting Care Facilities [HERE](#)*

## **Can lay workers or a pastoral care team visit a person in their home?**

*Up to **100** people may visit a home per day. Children are included in the visitor limit, but babies under the age of 12 months are not included in the visitor limit.*

*When you are preparing meals or caring for an elderly person you should be aware of the risks of transmitting coronavirus (COVID-19). Older people are especially vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19), so it is important you take extra steps to keep them safe. You should wear a face mask, maintain physical distancing and wash your hands regularly while visiting.*

*If you are delivering meals, think about leaving a package on their doorstep without making physical contact. If you are doing cleaning chores or other housework, have them sit somewhere comfortable away from you while you work, so you are not in close contact.*

*Make sure they are feeling well and ask them if they have enough of their regular medications whenever you visit. You should keep at least 1.5 metres distance between yourself and others wherever possible. You should wash your hands often.*

While record keeping is usually in the context of the workplace building environment, because a pastoral visit is in the context of a workplace, record keeping for 28 days should still be maintained – for instance in a work diary or calendar for contact tracing purposes if needed.

## **Can we hold a prayer group or small group?**

*Yes, you can attend a prayer group at a place of worship. The following restrictions apply:*

*Religious gatherings can be held indoors or outdoors. Venues must apply the two square metre rule to ensure people have enough room to maintain 1.5 metres distance between them. There are no group limits. All venues must use electronic record keeping through the free [Victorian Government QR Service](#) or [Victorian Government Application Programming Interface](#) linked digital system (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty in place to **23 April 2021**).*

*Religious gatherings and prayer groups held at a private residence are subject to the private gathering limit. This means the household itself plus up to **100** visitors per day (excluding any babies under 12 months old).*

## Can we hold meetings for the business of the congregation?

*This has not yet been addressed specifically*

The Victorian Government Stay Safe Directions provide

*'During the stay safe period, a person in the State of Victoria must not arrange to meet, or organise or intentionally attend a gathering of, more than 199 other persons (with any infant under one year of age not counting towards this limit) for a common purpose at a public place...'*

Stay Safe Directions(Victoria) (no 18)

The DCC approved guidelines for alternative mode congregational AGMs and SGMs can be found [HERE](#).

## What should be included in the Parish/Congregation COVIDsafe plan?

The COVIDsafe plan details the following:

- Ensure physical distancing and relevant density limits
- When to wear a face mask or other PPE
- Practise good hygiene
- Keep records and act quickly
- Avoid interactions in enclosed spaces
- Create workforce bubbles (will relate to volunteers also)

Click the [link](#) or go to

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covidsafe-plan>

Please also use the District Communication Plan in case of a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace. Download [HERE](#)

## Staying Safe general guidelines

- As restrictions ease, it's important that we act to keep ourselves and others safe. These actions below can help protect you from coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Stay safe by washing your hands regularly, having a face mask with you and wearing it when required, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, and keeping at least 1.5 metres from others.
- Keep your friends and family safe by meeting outdoors. There is a lower risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) between people if you are outdoors.
- You must carry a face mask with you at all times when you leave home. Wearing a face mask protects you and your community by providing an additional physical barrier to coronavirus (COVID-19). For more information visit [face masks](#)
- Venues and facilities have specific requirements such as operating with a COVIDSafe Plan, density limits (maximum numbers of people allowed in a space), cleaning and record keeping – please respect these.
- If you have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) get tested and stay home. Stay at home if you feel unwell.