

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS – 27 January

(Information in blue was last updated week commencing 25 January)

The Industry Restart Guidelines for Religion and Ceremonies was updated in the week commencing 25 January 2021 and is linked [HERE](#).

Can we gather in worship?

Religious gatherings can be held indoors or outdoors. Venues must apply the two square metre rule per person and also to ensure people have enough room to maintain 1.5 metres distance between them. There are no group limits. While attending a religious gathering there are steps you need to take to keep yourself and others safe including not sharing food, drink or other items. The two square metre rule can be used only if **electronic record keeping** is used, otherwise, the four square metre rule applies. The square metre rule doesn't include babies under 12 months of age.

The earlier restriction that faith leaders must be 5 meters from people when unmasked no longer applies. The general guideline of 1.5 meters distancing when unmasked applies here.

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]

A place of worship or venue hosting a wedding, funeral or religious gathering that is applying the two square metre rule must use electronic record keeping if applying the two square metre rule. Otherwise, the four square metre rule applies. The Victorian Government has a free QR code service available.

What are record keeping requirements

The Victorian Government has a free QR code service available.

If not using electronic record keeping, manual record keeping is required. A sign in sheet can be found [HERE](#)

If you decide to use a service other than the Service Victoria app, you should check that the app:

- handles personal information it collects in accordance with the Privacy Act
- stores data in Australia
- deletes the personal information it collects after 28 days as per the Workplace Direction

If the app does not meet the above requirements, you should use a different service, such as the Victorian Government's QR Code Service.

From a phone call to the DHHS COVID hotline: where the QR technology would be difficult for a congregation to support or participate in, a substitute option such as an electronically stored excel spreadsheet might be satisfactory. The data must be accurate, legible, and readily accessible by more than one trusted official and supply the detail needed – date, time, name and phone number – and be retained for 28 days. Privacy issues should be addressed (JOB ID 300041)

Do I need to wear a mask to worship?

From 11.59pm, Sunday 17 January 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 strongly 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 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

For more information on Religion and Ceremonies click [HERE](#).

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

The Victorian Government website provides the following information
'Faith leaders (in our context, pastors) can visit homes to provide religious guidance, to perform rituals or for care and compassionate reasons.'

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 30 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.

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

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. The two square metre rule applies only if electronic record keeping is used. Otherwise, the four square metre rule applies.

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 30 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 Stay Safe Directions (Victoria) (No4) provides:

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 99 other persons (with any infant under one year of age not counting towards this limit) for a common purpose at a public place,

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
- Wear a face mask
- 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). Everyone must wear a face mask when required, unless a lawful exception applies. 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.